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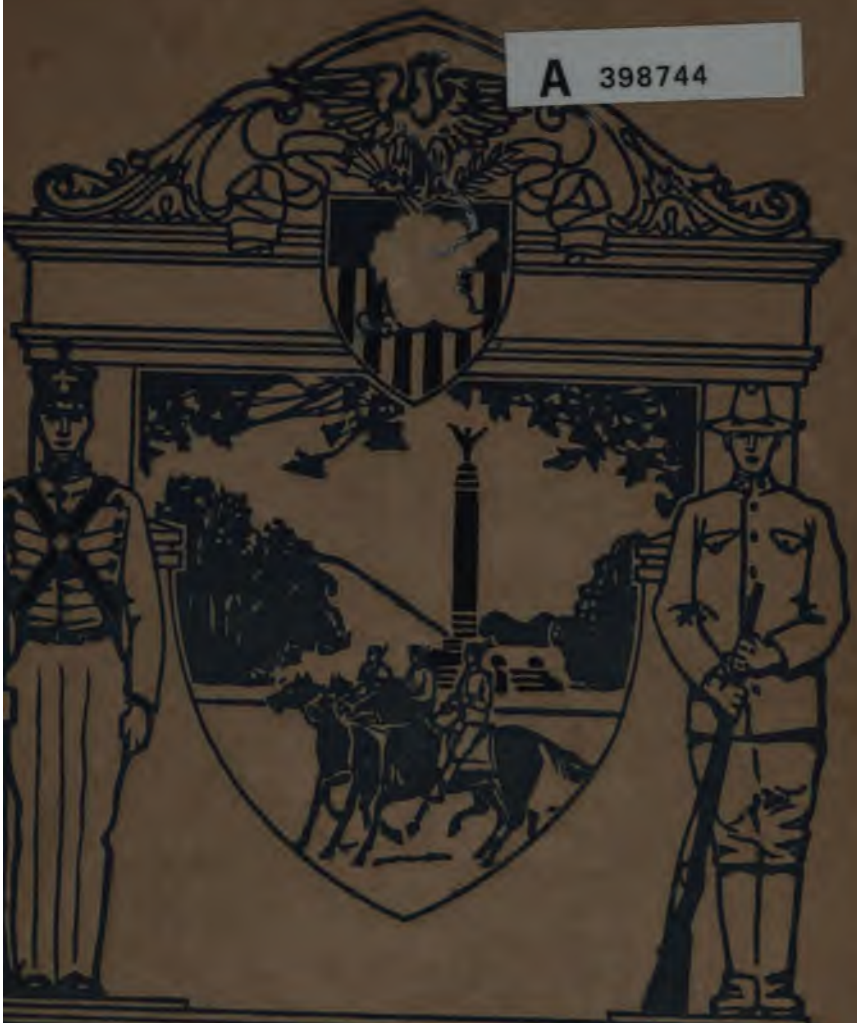

TO THE FRONT

GENERAL CHARLES KING

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[See p. 252

THE OPENING OF THE BATTLE AT WOUNDED KNEE

TO THE FRONT

A SEQUEL TO

CADET DAYS

BY

GENERAL CHARLES KING

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
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TO
THREE BOYS, CADETS YET TO BE
TO "COPE" AND THE MAJOR

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TO THE FRONT

TO THE FRONT

PRELUDE

IT was graduation day at West Point, and there had been a remarkable scene at the morning ceremonies. In the presence of the Board of Visitors, the full-uniformed officers of the academic and military staff, the august professors and their many assistants, scores of daintily dressed women and dozens of sober-garbed civilians, the assembled Corps of Cadets, in their gray and white, had risen as one man and cheered to the echo a soldierly young fellow, their "first captain," as he received his diploma and then turned to rejoin them. It was an unusual incident. Every man preceding had been applauded, some of them vehemently. Every man after him, and they were

many, received his meed of greeting and congratulation, but the portion accorded Cadet Captain "Geordie" Graham, like that of Little Benjamin, exceeded all others, and a prominent banker and business man, visiting the Point for the first time, was moved to inquire why.

"I think," said the officer addressed, a man of his own age, though his spare form and smooth-shaven cheek and chin made him look ten years younger—"I think it is that Graham has been tried in all manner of ways and has proved equal to every occasion. They say he's sheer grit."

A keen and close observer was the banker—"a student of men," he called himself. He had been tried in many a way and proved equal to every occasion. He had risen from the ranks to the summit. He, too, they said in Chicago, was "sheer grit." Moreover, they did not say he had "made his pile out of others' losings"; but, like most men who have had to work hard to win it, until it began to come so fast that it made itself, John Bonner judged men very much by their

power to earn money. Money was his standard, his measure of success.

And this, perhaps, was why John Bonner could never understand his brother-in-law, the colonel, a most distinguished soldier, a modest and most enviable man.

Twenty-five years had Bonner known that now gray-haired, gray-mustached veteran. Twenty-five years had he liked him, admired him, and much of late had he sought to know him, but Hazzard was a man he could not fathom.

"Fifteen years ago," said he to a fellow-magnate, "I told that man if he'd quit soldiering, and bring Carrie and the children to Chicago, I'd guarantee him an income ten times the regular pay he's getting; and he smiled, thanked me, and said he was quite content—content, sir, on two thousand a year, and so, too, was Sis. Now, think of that!"

And Bonner was bubbling over with the same idea to-day, yet beginning to see light. Two prominent senators, men of world-wide renown, held Hazzard long in close conference, and were merely civil to him, the

magnate, who, as he said, "could buy the three of 'em three times over." A general whose name was but second to that of Grant seized his brother-in-law by both hands, and seemed delighted to greet him, yet had barely a word for "his millions," him to whom the Board of Trade bowed humbly at home. A great war secretary, whom they had recently dined at the Grand Pacific and whose dictum as to the purchase of supplies meant much to Chicago, but vaguely remembered and absently greeted the man of wealth, yet beamed with pleasure at sight of his small-salaried soldier companion. The secretary drew Hazzard off to one side, in fact, and left the man of stocks and the stock-yards standing.

That evening, after the simple home dinner, with Carrie and the young people and the colonel smiling about the board, Bonner's vexation of spirit found vent. Duties drew the soldier away, and the banker was left with his sister.

"What is your pay *now*, Carrie?" he abruptly asked.

"A row of threes, John—$333.33 a month," was the amused answer.

"And Hazzard's been through two wars, Heaven knows how many campaigns and vicissitudes, and been serving the United States, night and day, some thirty years, and that's all he has to show for it, every cent of which has to go for living expenses—rearing, feeding, clothing, and educating these youngsters."

"Pretty nearly. We've a little laid by for Jack's college, and the President gives Lou his cadetship, you know, but"—and here the blithe-faced little woman looked archly at "Uncle John," though her look was one that said, "I mean every word of this"—"we don't think that's all there is to it, by any manner of means. Think of his war record! Isn't that a proud thing to leave to our boys? See how he is regarded by the best men in our country, from the President down! He is not yet an old man, but he has 'all that should accompany old age —love, honor, obedience, troops of friends' —and, honestly, John, with health and

competence and *us*, what more *should* he want?"

"Well," said Bonner, tenaciously, "I could have put him where he would have been worth three hundred thousand by this time."

"And it wouldn't have tempted him; and I'd rather see him as he is."

"Well, I'm blessed if I can understand it," said Bonner. Then callers put a stop to the chat. Then the colonel himself came home to his cosey quarters, and silence had settled down over the beautiful plain. The lights were dimmed in the barracks; the sentries paced their measured rounds; from the verandas of the hotel came the ripple of murmured words and soft laughter, and a tinkle of banjo and guitar. At the gate the colonel exchanged good-night greetings with a happy-faced, motherly looking woman whom Bonner had noticed overwhelmed with pride and emotion during the ceremonies in the morning. He did not at first recognize the tall, erect young fellow on whose arm she proudly leaned as she walked home through the shifting moonlight.

"That was young Graham, in whom you were so interested this morning," said Hazzard, briefly.

"*Was* it? Oh, I thought he'd gone with the graduates."

"Only down to the city to say good-bye. He came back to his mother by late train. I fancy she's more to him than a lot of fun with the boys."

"See here, Hazzard," observed Bonner, solemnly, "I've been looking into things here nigh onto a week. It's fine! It's all right for a soldier school! But, now take that young chap for a sample. What on earth does he know outside of drill and mathematics and what you call discipline? What could he do in case we cut off all this—this foolishness—and came down to business? I'd be willing to bet a sweet sum that, take him out of the army, turn him loose in the streets, and he'd starve, by gad! before he could ever earn enough to pay for a quick lunch."

"I think you'd lose," was the quiet answer.

"Well, I'd just like to try it. Pit him and

one year older, George Montrose Graham, graduated cadet, was "up against them," all three—mobs, miners, and Indians. How he met them and how he merited the colonel's confidence let them judge who read.

CHAPTER I

FROM THE GRAY TO THE BLUE

IT was just after sunset of one of the longest days of the loveliest of our summer months. The roar of the evening gun had gone re-echoing through the Highlands of the Hudson. The great garrison flag was still slowly fluttering earthward, veiled partially from the view of the throng of spectators by the snowy cloud of sulphur smoke drifting lazily away upon the wing of the breeze. Afar over beyond the barren level of the cavalry plain the gilded hands of the tower-clock on "the old Academic" were blended into one in proclaiming to all whom it might concern that it was five minutes past the half-hour 'twixt seven and eight, and there were girls in every group, and many a young fellow in the rigid line of gray and white before them, resentful of the fact

that dress parade was wofully late and long, with tattoo and taps only two hours or so away. The season for the regular summer "hops" had not yet begun, for this was away back in the eighties, when many another old West Point fashion still prevailed; but there was to be an informal dance in the dining-room of the hotel, and it couldn't come off until after supper, and supper had to be served to some people who were "pokey" enough to care to come by late boat, or later train, and were more eager to see the cadets on parade than to seek Mine Host Craney's once bountiful table.

What made it more exasperating was that rumors were afloat to the effect that the adjutant had long and important orders to publish, and this would still further prolong the parade. Cadet Private Frazier, First Class, one of the best dancers in the battalion, was heard to mutter to his next-door neighbor in the front rank of the color company: "It 'll be nine o'clock before we get things going at the hotel, and we've got to quit at nine-thirty. *Con*found the orders!" And

yet, peering from under the visor of his shako, Mr. Frazier could see without disturbing the requisite pose of his head, "up and straight to the front, chin drawn in," that over near the south end of the row of gayly attired visitors, seated or standing at the edge of the camp parade-ground, there was one group, at least, to whom, as Frazier knew, the orders meant much more than the dance. There, switching the short grass with his stocky cane, stood their grim senior surgeon, Doctor, or Major, Graham. There, close beside him and leaning on the arm of a slender but athletic, sun-tanned young fellow in trim civilian dress, stood the doctor's devoted wife. With them was a curly-headed youth, perhaps seventeen years of age, restless, eager, and impatient for the promised news. Making his way eagerly but gently through the dense throng of onlookers, a bronze-faced, keen-eyed, powerfully built officer in the uniform of the cavalry came up at the moment and joined them. "Have you heard anything yet?" he murmured to Mrs. Graham, whose kind and

gentle eyes seemed to light at sound of his voice.

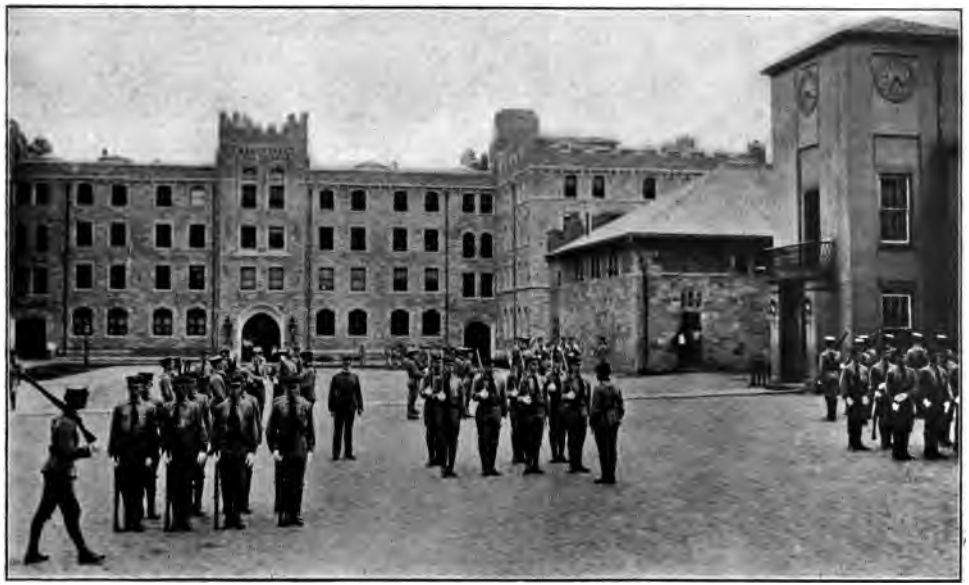
"Not yet," she answered, with a shake of the head. "All we learned just a few minutes ago was that the order was here and would be published on parade. The commandant returned only just in time."

"And there's been no telegram—no word from outside?"

"Not a thing, Mr. McCrea. It just so happened."

"Well, if that isn't odd! To begin with, it's most unusual to get out the order so early. They must be in a hurry to assign the graduates this year. Pops, old boy, if you don't get our regiment, I'll say the secretary of war is deaf to the wishes of every officer and most of the men. We told him when he came out to look over Fort Reynolds, and incidentally look into the mines—but that was last year— Oh, bother, Williams," he suddenly broke off, "what do you want to lose precious time for, putting 'em through the manual?"

This sudden outbreak was levelled at the



CADETS AT DRILL, WEST POINT

unconscious officer commanding the parade (the "officer in charge," as he was termed), Mr. Williams having replied, "Take your post, sir," to the adjutant's stately salute in presenting the statuesque line. Whereupon the adjutant "recovered" sword, strode briskly up, passed beyond the plumed commander, and took his station to his left and rear. With much deliberation of manner, Mr. Williams drew sabre and easily gave the various orders for the showy manual of arms, the white-gloved hands moving like clockwork in response to his command until, with simultaneous thud, the battalion resumed the "order," certain spectators with difficulty repressing the impulse to applaud.

Then back to the centre stalked the young adjutant, Mrs. Graham unconsciously drawing unflattering comparison between the present incumbent, soldierly though he seemed, and her own boy's associate and friend, Claude Benton, adjutant of the class graduated barely a fortnight earlier, "her own boy," perhaps the most honored among them. She was clinging to his arm now,

her pride and joy through all his years of sturdy boyhood and manly youth. She knew well that the hope and longing of his heart was to be assigned to the cavalry regiment of which Lieutenant McCrea was quartermaster, the regiment once stationed at old Fort Reynolds, in the Rockies, when Dr. Graham was there as post surgeon and Geordie was preparing for West Point. Indeed, Mr. McCrea had "coached" her son in mathematics, and had been most helpful in securing the appointment. And now here was the quartermaster on leave of absence, the first he had had in years, spending several weeks of his three months' rest at the scene of his own soldier school-days.

But it was "Bud," her younger son, who had come rushing down to the surgeon's quarters only a few minutes before parade with the all-important news. "Mither! — Geordie!" he cried, "Captain Cross says the assignment order's come and will be published at parade. Hurry up!"

Dr. Graham could hardly believe it. As

McCrea said, the War Department seldom issued the order before mid-July. "Mac" even hoped to be in Washington in time to say a word to the adjutant-general in Geordie's behalf. It was known that many would be assigned to the artillery, to which Cadet Graham had been recommended by the Academic Board. But all his boyhood had been spent on the frontier; his earliest recollections were of the adobe barracks and sun-dried, sun-cracked, sun-scorched parade of old Camp Sandy in Arizona. He had learned to ride an Indian pony in Wyoming before he was eight; he had learned to shoot in Montana before he was twelve; and he had ridden, hunted, fished, and shot all over the wide West before the happy days that sent him to the great cadet school of the nation. And now that he was graduated, with all his heart and hope and ambition he prayed that he might be commissioned in a cavalry regiment, if possible in McCrea's. Give him *that*, he said, and he would ask no favor from any man.

How his heart was beating as he watched

the adjutant, whom he himself had schooled and drilled and almost made, for Graham had been famous in his cadet days as a most successful squad instructor, a model first sergeant, and a great "first captain." How odd it seemed that he, a graduate, and that all these people, officers, and children, should now be hanging on the words that might fall from the younger soldier's lips! A telegram from Washington had told a veteran general visiting at the Point that his son had been assigned to the artillery, that the order would doubtless be published that evening. But it so happened that not until just before parade did the commandant return from a long ride, and so had no time to read it through. He had simply handed it, with others, to the silent young soldier, who had stood in full uniform full five minutes awaiting his coming. "Better order 'parade rest' part of time. It's a long read," he briefly said, and, stowing the orders under his sash, the adjutant had saluted, faced about, and hastened away.

And now that young official has received

the reports of the first sergeants and sent them, high-headed, martial, and precise, back to their stations in the line. And now again he has faced the commanding officer, saluted, and announced, "All are present, sir." And now that deliberate functionary has at last said, "Publish the orders, sir." And silence seems to fall, even upon the chatting groups of girls, as, with brief "'Tentio-o-o-on to Orders," the adjutant drops the point of his sword, letting it dangle from the gold swordknot on his wrist, and in another moment the clear young voice is ringing over the attent and martial audience.

"War Department, Washington, D. C., June 25, 189—," he begins, and then briskly rattles away at the terse official paragraphs: "The following assignment of graduates of the United States Military Academy are hereby announced to take effect from June 14th." It begins with that highly scientific and enviable body, the Corps of Engineers, and Mr. George Graham, up to this moment still officially known as cadet, touches his mother's arm at sound of the third name on

the list — that of Connell, his chum, his chosen comrade, his much-loved classmate through the long four years. "Dear old Con," he murmurs into her ears. "I'll telegraph my congratulations to him, whatever comes to me."

There are eight in all assigned to the engineers, and then come the names of those gazetted to the artillery—five famous regiments, too, and Graham notes with joy that Beard, Conway, Foster, and Lawrence, all of whom were lower in general standing than himself, get their longed-for billet with the "red legs," and his name is not mentioned. That means he has not been assigned where he preferred not to go. But would the war secretary assign him where he longed to be? Yes, here it comes, first on the cavalry list, and his heart beats for joy.

"F——th Regiment of Cavalry.

"No. 15, Cadet George Montrose Graham to be Second Lieutenant, Troop 'E,' *vice* Fenton, promoted."

And though her eyes are brimming and her lips *will* quiver, Mrs. Graham clasps both

her boy's hands in her own in speechless sympathy. It cannot all be joy, for this means miles and miles of separation that must come all too soon. Geordie can scarce believe his ears. Oh, it is too good! Not only the —th, but "E" Troop, Captain Lane's troop, the troop of which Feeny was first sergeant, the troop in which veteran Sergeant Nolan, two years ago at old Fort Reynolds, had said he and the men so hoped to see the day when Mr. Geordie might come back to them to be their lieutenant.

And now McCrea was grasping and wringing his hand, with a "Welcome to the old regiment, Geordie," and blue-eyed "Bud" was dancing rapturously about until the doctor sternly bade him cease. "Is that the way you think they behave at Columbia, sir?" having never seen the behavior of Columbiads, or other collegians, at a ball match or boat-race or any public occasion of undergraduate rejoicing. Even among the spectators were many who lost interest for the moment in what the adjutant was reading, and watched, with kindling eyes, the unexpected little

scene. But when Colonel Hazzard himself, the soldierly commandant, with his silver-gray mustache and hair, came striding through the crowd and held forth his hand to the young soldier, who instantly and instinctively faced him at attention, everybody within hearing noted the cordiality in his hearty tones as he shook Geordie's hand: "Mr. Graham, I'm more than glad you got the regiment of your choice, and you're going to one of the best captains in the army. I was on duty in tactics when Lane was in the Corps. Well, Mrs. Graham, we think we are sending him the making of one of the best lieutenants," and with that the colonel bowed as he took the hand of Geordie's mother. "Good sons make good soldiers all the world over, Mrs. Graham, and we'll expect great things of yours," he added, then grasped the doctor's out-stretched hand and gave way to others who came crowding forward, among them a gentle, motherly woman in half-mourning, whose eyes were moist as she exchanged greeting with Mrs. Graham.

"Benny will be here the moment they break ranks," she said. "I know he, too, will want to congratulate George."

And so there was quite a little gathering, and what the papers call an "ovation," about the young graduate, who was blushing not a little through his healthy tan. He was quite unable to hear where his classmates had been distributed in the other regiments of cavalry and infantry, and he was anxious to know, but even when the line of cadet officers came marching to the front and stood at salute before the battalion commander, and then broke ranks, and as many as a dozen made a rush at their former first captain, eager to take him by the hand and say a word of congratulation before they went bounding away to doff dress hats, plumes, and sashes — even then Graham could not see the order, for Colonel Hazzard called for it to show to a bevy of bright-eyed girls, who knew the graduating class, now scattered all over the United States, knew almost every one of them better than they did this, their foremost cadet officer, for

George Graham, though he could dance, had seemed to care little for hops and less for girls. His few leisure hours of the last year at the Point he had spent at the side of his mother.

But at last, leaving Mrs. Frazier and Benny at camp, the Grahams were walking slowly homeward in the wake of the brave young battalion, marching away with its quick, elastic stride to the spirited music of the fifes and drums. Lieutenant McCrea was still with them, while Lieutenant Wood, another family friend, had taken to the telegraph office Geordie's pencilled words of congratulation to his chum Connell, now lieutenant of engineers. Mrs. Graham leaned heavily on the arm of her sturdy son, thinking of all the joy that had been hers, after the years of separation. It had been such a welcome, welcome order that took Major Graham to duty at West Point the last lap of their boy's cadet life. Every Saturday evening he had spent "at home" in the surgeon's quarters, and many a Sunday afternoon. How she had looked forward

from week end to week end! How swiftly had the weeks slipped by! How would she miss him in the years to come! How lonely would be the Saturdays and Sundays without her boys, for "Buddy" too, was to leave the home nest. He had passed for Columbia and was to have some terms at what the doctor loved to call "the humanities" before taking up the study of medicine. Her heart had been full of rejoicing and thanksgiving when graduation came, barely a fortnight agone—yet when, for the last time in cadet uniform Geordie stood before her, so soldierly, so manly, so honored by his comrades in the Corps, and she followed him with brimming eyes when, leaving his diploma in her hand, he turned away to his room, in the tower of the old first division, to lay aside forever the plume and sash, the sword and chevrons of the first captaincy, to shed the academy uniform for good and all, she knew she wished the whole year could be lived over again; she knew she would rather the time were still far distant when her son should "change the gray for the blue."

But now, now, every hour of every day for three glorious and beautiful months, she was to have him by her side. She need not, she would not, think of the separation to come late in September, when he must join his regiment and be her boy no more. At least she would try not to think, but here was this cold, stern, business-like order to remind her that she had given her first-born to the service of his country—that now he belonged to the general government and no longer to her. All too soon — oh, many weeks too soon—had the mandate appeared, for it would haunt her day and night until the hour for parting came. Ah, thank God, that at least would not be for weeks! Even Geordie now had become silent and serious. He was listening to McCrea's eager words to Dr. Graham, all about the regiment and Fort Reynolds, and how he wished they were back there again, the finest station the —th had ever had, he declared, and "so near the mines!"

"Just think, Geordie," he cried, "if we were all at Reynolds we could run up the

range to the Silver Shield any day, and watch them dragging out gold."

"You haven't lost faith in the Shield, then?" asked Mrs. Graham, smilingly. She thought and cared so little herself. She knew that several officers at Reynolds, her husband and McCrea among them, had invested their scant savings in that most promising venture. She knew that McCrea had vowed it would make them all rich if not famous one of these days, and that her methodical, cautious "canny Scot" of a husband had figured, pondered, and consulted long before he, too, had become convinced. She knew their holdings had been quoted far above what was paid for them, but what of all that? She had her boys, her husband, her army home, her health, and high content. What was wealth to her?

"I own I was thinking more of the hunting and fishing, the scenery, and the splendid range," said Geordie, "but no matter where 'E' Troop goes, I want to be with it."

"If the Shield pans out according to promise," said McCrea, with a laugh, "the

regiment won't see me for many a day after I realize. I'm going in for a year's leave—and Europe."

They had reached the front of Grant Hall by this time and were strolling slowly along, their voices hushed for the moment by the cheery hum of boyish talk and the clatter of mess furniture, as the Corps sat at their late supper. Then several officers, gathered about the steps of the club rooms in the south end, lifted their caps to Mrs. Graham and smiled greeting to the party.

"Come back, Geordie!" was the cheery hail. "We want to wet that assignment in cavalry fashion." But Graham laughed and shook his head.

"Can't break away just now," said he. "I'll look in later."

"What I can't understand," said McCrea, "is that we got no word. With Freeman and Blake both on duty in Washington, one would think they'd have wired if they knew."

"It's coming now," said the doctor, pointing to the telegraph orderly turning away from the steps of his quarters and coming

swiftly toward them, brown envelope in hand. Just in front of the hospital gateway he met the party, saluted, and tendered the uppermost of two or three despatches to the doctor.

"Freeman, I'm betting," said McCrea, as the doctor tore it open and read. They walked on slowly, expectant, but he did not speak. Then Mrs. Graham turned, gave one look, dropped Geordie's arm and clasped that of her husband. The rugged, weather-beaten face had grown suddenly gray.

"George! husband!" she cried. "What's gone wrong?"

For answer he simply handed her the paper.

"Designate proxy; meeting Monday. Fear everything lost. Come if possible."

"Mac," said the old doctor, solemnly, "it's Silver Shield that's melted away. Everything we had in the world."

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST CALL

FORT REYNOLDS, as has been told in the earlier story of George Graham's cadet days, lay among the eastward foothills of the Rocky Mountains, with a bustling little frontier city only six miles away down the winding valley of what was, in the early eighties, a clear, cold, and beautiful mountain stream that shone in the sun like molten silver.

Silver Run it was called when Uncle Sam built the picturesque frontier fort of hewn logs and unseasoned pine soon after the Civil War. Silver Run, cold, pure, and glistening, it remained when Fort Reynolds became an important military post. Then the —th Cavalry took station at Reynolds, and there Geordie Graham found them when, with his father and mother and "Bud," he

had come from cold Montana to the finest station they yet had known, and to the firmest friends, many of whom they had met before, when Geordie, as a little boy, was "Corporal Pops" to every man at old Camp Sandy.

But Silver Run, though it ran more silver than it ever knew before, was beautiful no longer. Mines of remarkable value, mines of gold and silver, had been discovered twenty and thirty miles back in the mountains. Mining towns had sprung up along the steep and rocky banks. Mining methods had turned a limpid stream into a turbid torrent. Two railways had run their lines, hewing, blasting, boring, and tunnelling up the narrow valley, first to reach the mines and finally to merge in a "cut-off" to the great Transcontinental, so that now huge trains of Pullmans went straining slowly up-grade past the site of old Fort Reynolds, or came coasting down with smoking tires and fire-spitting brake-shoes, and between the loss of the water for his horses, and the hemming in of his rifle-ranges by rail right of way,

Uncle Sam declared Fort Reynolds no longer tenable for cavalry. The regiment had been sent elsewhere, and only a quartermaster-sergeant and a squad of men remained.

Yet Reynolds stood in the midst of thriving industries and swarming men. The First National Bank in town had now a marble front and a thousand depositors. The town was now a city and a railway centre, and the backbone of its business was no longer cattle, but mines and mining, full of fabulous wealth for those "on the inside," but of dark and devious measures for those "on the outside" or away, and of these were half a dozen army officers who had been dazzled by the easily acquired dollars of the earliest arrivals, and of these officers was one of the last men his friends thought possible to mislead—shrewd, calculating, cautious, canny old "Sawny" Graham, post surgeon at Fort Reynolds in the late eighties.

Yet prospectors and explorers ten years earlier had declared gold would be found up the banks of Silver Run. In the glorious park country back of Squaw Cañon, where

Geordie and Bud had camped and fished and hunted as boys, the signs of the restless scouts of the great army of miners were to be seen at every hand. And then finally, in the very September that followed the return of Graham and Connell to take up the last half of their course at the Academy, there came sudden and thrilling announcement of "big finds" along Lance Creek, the upper tributary of Silver Run; then even finer indications on the Run itself, and the West went wild. All of a sudden the mountain-sides bristled with armed men and their *burros*. Camps sprang up in a night and shafts were sunk in a day. Yampah County, from primeval wilderness, leaped to renown, with a population of ten thousand. Gold and silver came "packed" down the trails to the First National. Then, faster than the precious metal came down, costly machinery, and prices, went up. Fortunes were declared in a week. Officers and men at Reynolds caught the craze.

Many an old sergeant took his discharge and his savings and went to the mines; and

young troopers without discharges took their lead and followed suit, and the colonel wired the War Department that if the regiment wasn't ordered away there wouldn't be anything left to order in the spring. Luckily, heavy snow-storms came and blocked the trails, and there was a lull at the mines, but unluckily, not before the few officers at Reynolds who had saved a dollar had invested every cent of their savings in the shares of the Golconda, the White Eagle, the Consolidated Denver, and especially the Silver Shield, and the man who, through frugality and good management, had the most to invest, and who had invested all, was Major Graham. When he left there for West Point the August following he had refused four times what he paid for his shares, and saw fortune smiling on his pathway to the Hudson. Now, less than ten months thereafter, on the borders of the Hudson, he saw ruin staring him in the face.

For there had been assessments, and he had borrowed to meet them. There had come rumors of "leaks" and he had kept

them to himself. McCrea, his boy's best friend in the regiment, had consulted him only ten days back as to whether it were not wise to realize on a portion at least of their holdings, and Graham, dreading a "bear" movement on the market, had said, "Hold fast."

And now McCrea had turned back. He must go at once, he said, to the telegraph office. So Graham, his sorrowing wife, and his silent boys went on. She led him into their cheery quarters, and seated him in his old arm-chair and came and nestled beside him.

"What is there to grieve about, dear?" she pleaded. "What does it really matter to us? We have health, home, our boys, each other—quite enough to live on— Why should it so distress you? Indeed, I almost cried aloud, 'Is that all?' when you showed me the message. I feared so much worse. Why, think, Graeme, in all the gay crowd that comes here every day, is there a woman half as happy as I am? Is there one of them really as rich as we are — we who have so many blessings?"

"It's for 'Bud' I'm thinking most now," was the mournful answer. "There can be no Columbia for him. I've borrowed money to meet the assessments, and the money's got to be paid. This isn't like having one's house burned, or his ranch blown away, his herds scattered, by the act of God. This is being robbed of the savings of years by organized, legalized swindlers, men who claimed to be our friends. It's that—and my helplessness—that hurts."

The boys had remained without, talking in low, grave tones, Bud's boisterous spirits suddenly quenched. Presently the sound of their murmuring died away. There was no answer when Mrs. Graham called. Going to the door she looked anxiously about her. From up the roadway to the north came the sound of merry voices and the shuffle of many feet — the battalion hurrying down the broad stone steps of Grant Hall and forming for the march back to camp. The young "first captain" called them to attention and gave the commands that swung them into column of platoons and striding away

under the leafy arch to the open plain. Oh, with what pride had she not listened, night after night, from September to mid-June, to Geordie's ringing, masterful tones, *her* Geordie, foremost officer of the Corps! And now all that was ended with the graduation to which he had so long looked forward, and now, when but half an hour ago he had so rejoiced in his assignment to the regiment of his choice — now must come this cloud upon his young life, his and blithe-hearted Bud, who so adored him. She knew well that his first act would be to set aside a certain portion of his scanty pay for her use, and for her own part she would not so have it.

But where were the boys, and why had they gone? It was some minutes before Bud returned, alone.

"Where is Geordie?" she asked.

Bud dropped his cap on the hall table, looking dispirited and troubled.

"Gone to the hotel, mother—wants to see"—with a gulp—"McCrea—and I'm of no use to anybody."

"You can be and will be," was the gentle answer, as the mother wound an arm about and led him within. There in silence and semi-darkness they sat awhile. The doctor had gone into his little library to look over memoranda and accounts. It was nine o'clock when Geordie's quick, soldierly step was heard on the walk without. He came bounding up and in, alert, virile, and vigorous.

"You saw Mr. McCrea, Geordie?"

"Yes, mother. He's going to Newburg to catch the Pacific express on the Central, and, mother—I'm going with him."

CHAPTER III

AWAY TO THE WEST

BY the general regulations of the United States army there is granted three months' leave of absence to graduated cadets of the Military Academy, to be taken advantage of immediately after graduation. It is given to these young men after their four years of rigorous discipline and hard study, that they may have abundant time to visit home and friends, and to enjoy a period of rest before reporting for duty again to begin their careers as officers of the army.

For nearly two weeks since Graham's graduation day the mother had had him for her very own, busying herself in the choice of his modest outfit, and taking it not a little to heart that he declined to order his uniform and equipment until, as he said, he knew where he was going. She longed to

see him in his "regimentals," yet shrank from it as a reminder that all too soon he would be taken from her side to wear it day after day with his comrades in arms. She could not think of that parting to come late in September. She would think only of the glory that was hers in having him here, having him now, with no bugle-call to tear him from her side. She was just beginning to realize her possession, her happiness, when that hateful telegram told of disaster at the mines, and urged her husband to have a representative at the spot. Within one hour of its receipt, George had come to say that he would be that representative, and within two hours, with at least his father's full consent, her dream was at an end and her boy was gone.

That night toward ten he and McCrea were spinning away up the west shore under the lofty, rock-ribbed scarp of Crow Nest and Storm King, to ferry over to Fishkill from Newburg, and there take the Pacific express, making its first stop out of New York City. Each had hurriedly packed such

store of clothing as seemed most appropriate to the region and the business to which he was bound. There was no vestige of uniform or badge of rank and station. Geordie took with him his favorite rifle, and in his valise, to be exhumed when they reached the Rockies, was a revolver he knew, rather better than his classmates, how to use, for he had learned as a lad on the plains. Each had his ticket for Chicago, where they were to change for Denver. Each had a money belt and a modest sum in currency. Each had his hopes of rescuing something if not all of the imperilled property, and neither had even a vague idea of the peril, difficulty, and treachery he was destined to encounter.

Everything had promised well when Silver Shield was first exploited. Its promoters and agents showed high-grade ore, and reports of expert mining engineers promised abundance of it. All that was needed was development. "Come in now, on the ground-floor, and you'll be coining money in a year's time," said Mr. Breifogle, and to the number of seven the commissioned force at Fort

Reynolds had "come." So long as they remained close to the spot all seemed going well. But Graham had been ordered to the Point, and the regiment over in the Oklahoma country. Then came trouble.

It seemed odd that stock held so high should so soon have to be assessed. But "some expensive machinery was necessary." Then came a second and larger demand. Silver Shield was so valuable that envious eyes had been directed to it, and fraudulent claims and claimants were constantly turning up. Threatened litigation would be long and expensive. It would be cheaper far to buy off the litigants. So Graham, with a sigh and sore premonition of trouble, obtained the necessary amount on his personal note. McCrea, with inward misgiving, borrowed and sent it. Officers at Reno sent up what they could, but it wasn't enough, and in May came a third appeal. The secretary wrote that litigation had begun, and there was reason to believe the courts were being "approached" by the enemy. It was absolutely essential that "these parties should

be bought off," and quite a sum would be necessary. The First National Bank of Argenta (which had once been robbed of a great sum by road-agents, who were run down and captured by officers and men of the —th, and the money recovered) ought in all conscience to be grateful to its benefactors, yet when Graham, McCrea, and Major Lawrence wrote, begging advice in the premises, the bank was non-committal. Some of its customers were among the litigants, as was later discovered. And so it resulted that not until near the end of June did it dawn upon the officers involved that the whole matter was nothing more nor less than a well-conceived, but rascally, scheme to "milk them dry," as was the expression, secure their shares at a sacrifice, or drive them out entirely.

And they, the absentees, were only seven against seventy or more, who were experienced in all the crafts and devices by which mines have been dug at the expense of the many and then made to enrich the few.

It was late at night when the fellow-

travellers reached Denver. McCrea was depressed and silent, Geordie eager to push ahead. The former had had time to think over the situation, and in Chicago, while waiting for the Pacific express to start, he had had a fifteen-minute talk with a relative, a Western business man, to whom mining and undermining were matters well understood, and what this expert said had filled him with dismay. "You've simply been bled until you could bleed no more," said he. "Now they've no further use for you. What they want is your stock at five cents on the dollar, to sell to some new gudgeon at fifty. Why on earth, Mac, when you were considering this, didn't you consult me?" Why, indeed! Like many another man, Mac's eyes had been blinded, his ears deafened to everything but the wiles of the charmer. But with Geordie it was different. He had come because his father was bound to the wheel of duty and could not. Moreover, barring inexperience and youth, Geordie was better fitted to go and do than was his father, the doctor.

He would waste no time with agents. He would employ no lawyer—that was simply waste of both time and money. Of the former they had little and of the latter even less. But his brain was active and fertile. He had slept but little on their swift westward way until after crossing the Mississippi. His mother's grief at parting, and her speechless anxiety as to the dangers that might beset him, had affected him deeply, and at first his silence and preoccupation were due to that. But the fighting blood of the Graeme was in his veins, and against the abominable wrong these "sharks" would do his father and his scattered friends the young fellow was bent on giving valiant battle; and he thought he saw his way to strike and to strike hard.

McCrea had given him the names of most of the sergeants of the old regiment who, when their time expired, had taken their discharge and gone to the mines. Among them were three on whom he believed he could count to back him in a pinch. Among them was the veteran Nolan, on whom he *knew* he could count.

McCrea had wired ahead to an old and trusted friend, a resident of Denver and a successful railway engineer. He was at the station waiting when the two alighted from their train. It was McCrea's plan to spend one day in Denver in consultation with certain officials, and then to spring a surprise on the "board" at Argenta two days later. He had wired to Fort Reno on the way, urging that one officer, at least, of those most interested should hasten to Denver and meet him, and in the hands of Mr. Warden, their engineer friend, was the reply: Captain Lee would be with them in the morning. To register at a prominent hotel would simply advertise their coming. Warden had seen to that and engaged quarters for them near his own. Thither they were to go at once, and, valises in hand, they followed Warden's lead, McCrea and their guide talking eagerly together, Geordie following, silent and observant. Toward the iron gateway they pressed, jostled and elbowed by hurrying passengers.

"It's but a few blocks' walk," Warden was

saying. "I've a cart to take your grips and we can chat as we go. I thought you'd be glad of a bite or a cup of tea or something before turning in. Mr. Ross, who wired Dr. Graham, is here, and he'll meet us at the restaurant. He thinks they are following him—shadowing him."

"Who?" asked McCrea.

"Why, the crowd that are trying to get control there of Silver Shield. Some of them live in Argenta, he says, and found out he had been in correspondence with the doctor, and that it was he who had given warning." Then, glancing over his shoulder as they neared the gate, and speaking to Geordie, he continued, "What is the name of the brewer up there who wanted your place at the Point for his son?"

"Breifogle."

"That's the man," answered Warden. "Ross says he's one of the leaders of the move. Most of his money has been made by freezing out other men."

And just at that moment, moving leisurely along in the rear of the train-load of belated

passengers, they reached the exit gate, and the instant they came under the broad, blue-white glare of the electric globe overhead there was a sudden stir in the little gathering along the iron fence. A burly young man darted swiftly away, and in his haste tripped backward over an empty baby carriage. In a second he was floundering on the floor, his bowler hat rolling one way, his stick flying another. A shrill voice began to berate him as he struggled to his feet, but he paused neither to explain nor listen. He swooped for his hat and shot for a dark passage, but not before Geordie had caught a glimpse of his face.

"That was young Breifogle," said he.

CHAPTER IV

"I'M READY NOW"

THERE was no other train over the Transcontinental, westward, before 7.30 A.M. They had reached Denver by the Pacific express, and in five minutes the sleeper in which the two had journeyed from Chicago would be whirling swiftly away for "The Springs" before beginning the long, tortuous climb over the huge bulwark between them and the watershed of the great Colorado beyond. There had really been no reason why Graham should stop over at Denver. He knew none of the officials of the Silver Shield there resident. He did not wish to know them. They had doubtless conspired with their associates at Argenta to "squeeze out" his father and friends. They hoped and expected to buy in for a song the valuable stock held by this scattered band of

soldiers and some twenty or thirty prospective victims in the distant East. This would give them a controlling interest in the property. It would make them virtual owners of a valuable mine. It would make them richer by far than they were beforehand. This would impoverish, and it might ruin, many of the absent who had furnished the means by which Silver Shield was developed. It was robbery outright, but robbery of a kind so common in our country that people have become callous to it. It was by just such means and methods that many of the great fortunes of America have been won, and the winners ride to-day on the topmost wave of prosperity and popular acclaim, when, if the people but realized the truth, many an object of their adulation would be wearing convict stripes and prison pallor to the end of his dishonored days.

But Graham had journeyed with his long-time friend and senior officer—senior by seven years—and McCrea's plans, to a certain point, seemed to dominate those of the younger and less experienced man. McCrea's idea was to

"tackle" the local directors first and compel recognition of their rights. He, as post quartermaster, had had business dealings with bankers and merchants both in Denver and Chicago. He believed that, reinforced by the presence of Captain Lee from Reno, he could make a certain impression, or else certain threats, that would bring these magnates to time.

But Dr. Graham, an older head, thought otherwise, had so instructed Geordie and so endeavored to impress McCrea. The 'men, said he, had planned this out. "They stand to lose little in the market if the stocks are 'beared.' They have invested little; we have invested our all. If nothing was found they could quit. If good ore was found, then it was their game to conceal the fact, to demand more and more money for more and more development, force us out, get our shares, and own the property. Why, laddie, the man that warned me dared not sign his name, for every wire was watched; yet I'd stake six months' pay he's got the rights of it. There's ore there in plenty!"

And so every indication said at the start. It wasn't until many Eastern people had been induced to invest (Dr. Graham's New York friends, the Fraziers, among them) that managers and directors began to tell dismal tales and ask for more and more. It was then that Dr. Graham bethought him of a brother Scot who dwelt near Argenta, a man once so poor that when his bairns were down with diphtheria he could not coax Argenta doctors out across the five-mile stretch of storm-swept, frozen prairie. It was the burly post surgeon from the fort who rode eight miles to and eight miles back in any kind of weather, night or day, until he snatched those babies back from death, and gave them, weak and gasping, yet alive, to the arms of their weeping and imploring and at last rejoicing mother. Oh, those are deeds that women remember so long as life remains to them, and that but few men forget, and the clansman, who couldn't begin to pay in cash for what "the Graeme" had done for him and his, could reward in fealty now. It was Donald Ross to whom the doctor had writ-

ten, and Ross who made investigation and reply.

And yet, though he had taken precaution to send his letter from a village post-office, and his message from a railway station ten miles east of Argenta, the spies of Silver Shield had heard of one or both, and now their watcher knew that two at least of the enemy were in their camp. For what else was young Breifogle there? For what but to give warning had he so suddenly vanished?

It was of all this that Geordie was thinking, as silently he strode along by the side of the two elders, hearing yet scarcely heeding their eager talk. He had plans and projects of his own. Father was not the only one who had a friend or two in Yampah and up the range. Veteran troopers of the old regiment were scouting there for gold and silver, where ten years earlier they had scouted for the red warriors of Colorow and Yampah Jack. If he could but get in touch with Nolan, with Feeny, with almost any one of those now mining who once rode in "E" Troop! If he could only reach some of

the men he guided over the Divide to the successful capture of the gang that looted the First National! Oh, the shame of Breifogle's ingratitude! As one of the bank's directors at that time, he had pledged everlasting gratitude to the officers and troopers who had restored their treasure.

Suddenly Warden turned a corner, pushed back a swinging door, led the way into a clean, brightly lighted little "dairy" restaurant, passed on through to the less public tables partitioned off in alcoves of their own, and here, behind an outspread newspaper, sat, lonely and expectant, a broad-shouldered ranchman whose weather-beaten face beamed joyously at sight of the three, and whose big hands were on young Graham's squared shoulders before they had fairly shaken greeting to any one. "Geordie, mon, but it's glad I am to see ye!" was the whispered welcome. "Softly, now, there's—others here."

Quickly they were served with steaks, scrambled eggs, toast, tea or coffee, as they chose, and two at least were hungry, yet Geordie, brimful of eagerness to put his plan

into execution, could hardly spare time to eat. Yes, Ross knew Nolan and Feeny of old. Many's the time they'd dropped in at the ranch when antelope-stalking down the foot-hills. Nolan had prospered. He and Feeny, both, when last heard of were somewhere up among the mines. Burns was in Collins's Camp on Lance Creek. Toomey and Scully had got "cleaned out" and were firing on the Transcontinental.

"Where?" demanded Geordie, his eyes dilating.

"Mountain Division, both of 'em. Toomey on the Mogul that pulls the Time Freight over the range—" And here Geordie stopped him.

"Hear this, Mr. McCrea," said he. "Toomey, of 'E' Troop, fireman on the big freight-engine! He'll surely know where the others are. Now, *you* know the railway people. You say you've got to stay here a day or two. Get *me* permission to ride on any freight-engine, Mountain Division, for the next three days, and I'm off for the mines before we're half a day older, and no man here or there the wiser."

"They'd spot you as you went through Argenta," said McCrea. "Breifogle will be watching every train."

"Every *car* of every train, perhaps; but I'll be firing by the time we get there, black with soot and coal-dust, and they wouldn't know me if they saw me. If the division superintendent doesn't give it away—and you—who's to know I've turned fireman on a freight? There's my chance, McCrea, and you know it!"

"By Jove, Geordie, but I believe you're right," was McCrea's answer, rising to his feet and facing the eager young fellow across the table. "You're a 'dandy,' as was said of you on graduation day, only it was meant in a different sense. Who's in charge at the station now, Warden?" he asked, with sudden resolution. "I knew most of their traffic men when I was quartermaster."

Warden whipped out a railway folder. "Colorado Transcontinental," he read, and began skimming down a long list of official titles and names. Traffic managers, freight and passenger agents, superintendents, divi-

sion superintendents, and then, "Here we are, Mountain Division: W. B. Anthony."

"Know him well," cried McCrea. "He brought the first passengers up to Argenta in eighty-seven. He was freight conductor on the U. P. when I was a boy at Cheyenne. We'll nab him first thing in the morning."

"Can't we nab him to-night?" asked Geordie.

McCrea laughed. "You're keen as your father, Pops," said he. "Niver put off till t'-morrow what can be done the day."

"The laddie's right," said Ross. "I'm betting you'll find him at the yards till after No. 2 comes in—the Flyer—that's due at 12.40."

And so it happened that, as the clocks were pointing to the quarter after midnight, Lieutenant Ralph McCrea and the newly appointed subaltern, both in plain travelling dress, once more appeared at the Union Station, and presently learned that Mr. Anthony was about the yard. It was not long thereafter that they found him, busy, as such men must ever be, yet recognizing

McCrea at a glance and giving him cordial welcome.

But when McCrea presented his friend, "Lieutenant Graham, whose father you probably knew as post surgeon at Reynolds," and then made his request, the official looked grave.

"It's against orders," said he. "The Old Man has jacked up more than one of the best engineers for allowing it. Why, the Governor had to get a permit from the general manager for his son to ride in the cab of the Flyer only last week, and for some reason they've shut down on our freight people entirely. Gil Frost, bringing his own brother, who used to fire on the Union Pacific, over on old 550 two weeks ago, had to dance the carpet the next morning right here in Denver."

"How do you break in your *new* firemen?" asked Geordie. "Some of our best men are firing for you now. They had to begin somehow, I suppose."

"Pitch 'em neck and crop into a cab, with a short-handled shovel and a sharp-tongued

old hand. It nigh breaks their backs, but they learn quick that way."

"Well, pitch me, neck and crop, into a cab, with as short a handle and sharp a tongue as you like, Mr. Anthony. I'm on three months' leave, and for reasons of my own want to learn how to fire an engine."

For a moment Anthony looked at the young fellow in amaze. Then the resolute, square-jawed, clean-cut face began to impress him.

"Well, I've been dealing with you army men out here nigh onto twenty years," said he, "and I'm blessed if I ever heard the like of that."

"Don't let it surprise you into telling it, Anthony, that's all," put in McCrea. "Here! Let me give you a pointer—you've got a West Pointer. I've known you for a square man ever since we were stationed at Russell," and, linking his arm in that of the astonished official, McCrea drew him a few paces away from the point where they found him, with a great passenger-engine hissing and throbbing close at hand, waiting to take the Flyer

whirling eastward toward the Missouri. Geordie stood silently and watched them. He saw the wonderment in Anthony's strong face give way to interest as McCrea talked rapidly on; saw interest deepen to sympathy and a certain excitement. In three minutes Anthony broke away and came hurrying back, looking at his watch.

"Mr. Graham," said he, "d' you want to go up the line this very night? Could you be ready in two hours?"

"I'm ready now," was the instant reply. "All I want is an old cap and overalls—the blacker the better."

CHAPTER V

FIRST NIGHT ON THE RANGE

AWAY up among the Rockies, with towering, pine-fringed, snow-sprinkled crests looming dimly about them in the moonlight, two young men stood waiting by a switch-target of the Transcontinental. Facing westward, they could see the huge bulk of the mountain range rolling up between them and the starry sky-line, black and forbidding in the middle distance, yet fading away northward and southward into faint and tender outlines—soft grays and violets—and with the earliest signals in the East of the speedy coming of the long summer's day. Facing eastward, there confronted them close at hand the huge black bulk of the mammoth Mogul engine, its dazzling headlight shining afar up the westward right of way, and throwing into heavier shade, by

force of contrast, every object outside its beams. In the solemn stillness of nature in those high levels, almost the only sound was the soft hiss of escaping steam from the cylinder-cocks or an occasional rumble from the boiler. Even murmured words seemed audible and intelligible sixty feet away, and twice big Ben Tillson, the engineer of 705, had pricked up his ears as he circled about his giant steed, oiling the grimy joints, elbows, and bearings, and pondering in his heavy, methodical way over certain parting instructions that had come to him from the lips of the division superintendent. "A young feller learning firing" would board him at Chimney Switch, forty miles out from the Springs, and the Boss desired Ben Tillson to understand that "The Road" had its reasons, and the "young feller" was to be spared the customary quizzing. Furthermore, Ben Tillson was to understand that nothing was to be said about it. If anybody at Argenta or among the mines had any questions to ask, Ben was to know next to nothing.

But what set Ben's wits to work was the

odd behavior of his fireman, Jim Toomey. Toomey was a silent sort of chap as a rule, and surely, too, with a grudge against the gang over in Hatch's Cove and up the Run. Toomey had taken to firing because he had got cleaned out at the mines. Toomey ordinarily wasn't over-civil to anybody. Toomey, too, had been favored with a word from Mr. Anthony, and never had Big Ben seen his fireman more cheery over his work than he was that night as they panted and strained up the foot-hills to Chimney Switch. Ben could have sworn Toomey was "excited like" when they side-tracked there for a way-train, and never in the course of Big Ben's experience had he seen an old fireman greet a would-be as Toomey welcomed the tall "young feller" in the dirty cap, shirt, and overalls who there clambered into the cab. Twice, Ben could have further sworn, he had heard Toomey say "sir," a word Toomey used to no one less than the division superintendent.

Somewhat grudgingly and suspiciously, therefore, had Ben nodded greeting and looked the "young feller" over. He did not

extend his hand. The new-comer had on a pair of oiled-buck gauntlets, "soldier gauntlets," such as the cavalry used to have at Reynolds, that "all the boys in the cabs are stuck on." Even at the hardest kind of shovelling they outlived every other kind a dozen weeks, and the fireman was a lucky malefactor who could induce a soldier to part with his.

And though the "young feller's" cap and clothing were strictly and unimpeachably professional and grimy, it was the face no less than the gloves and boots that told Ben Tillson this was no needy seeker after a job. The boots were new and fine, laced daintily up the front, and showed their style even through the lack of polish and the coating of dust and ashes. The gauntlets also, though worn and old, were innocent of grease. This was no cub fireman, said Ben, resentfully, as he revolved in mind a scheme or two that should take the stuffing of conceit out of him, when suddenly he paused. "Why, certainly," Ben had it, just another case such as he had been reading about,

how the sons of successful railway magnates, discarding wealth and luxuries, had determined to learn the business from the bottom up and fit themselves for future eminence in railway circles. The "young feller" must be a Gould or a Vanderbilt, a Ledyard, a Huntington, a son of somebody at the financial head of things. While sacrificing none of his steady self-reliance or self-respect, Ben Tillson decided to treat his new fireman, assistant to the old, with all due civility. He would cringe or kowtow to no one, but, like the sturdy citizen he was, Ben deemed it wise to keep on the good side of the powers. It was necessary, however, that the newcomer should understand who was boss on that engine, and even as they stood waiting at the Chimney Ben had taken occasion to say, "I see you're not stuck on shovelling, young man"; then with a most knowing and suggestive wink, "I reckon you'd rather do tennis or tiddlywinks," and was surprised at the answer.

"As matters stand, I'd rather be shovelling here than playing tennis—anywhere."

"It's the first time you ever saw the West from a cab-window, I'm betting," said Ben. And George Graham, who had seen more of the West than Ben could ever hope to see, and who knew the Silver Run country before ever the railway reached the foot-hills, had the wisdom to answer, "You'd win."

And now at Buffalo Butte 705 was side-tracked, awaiting the coming of passenger No. 4, east bound, and then—then there would be a clear run to and through Argenta. Then would come the familiar scenes about old Fort Reynolds; then the wild and picturesque beauty of Squaw Cañon and Hatch's Cove, and then George Graham would be able to judge by surface indications how far his disguise had really disguised him. Toomey had already told him where Nolan and Feeny could be found. Toomey was to send word or a letter to both of them, and then it would be time to decide on the next move.

For now the scheme was to reach the heart of what might be called the enemy's country, and to get there unsuspected, unobserved, and thus far all was working well.

It was the second morning after his reaching Denver. Mr. Anthony had put him through to the Springs, and then to Chimney Switch, where he was to wait for 705 and Toomey. And even now as they stood there, he and Toomey, exchanging at intervals some low-toned words at the switch, the eastward skies were slowly taking on their early morning garb of pink and violet, the eastward fronts of the snow-sifted peaks and domes far to the north and south were lighting up with wondrous hues of gold and crimson; the stars aloft were paling and the moon was sinking low, and still big 705 stood hissing and grumbling placidly on the long siding, and the green lights back at the caboose blinked sleepily against the dawn. Two glimmering threads of light in rigid right lines, converging far beyond the rear of the train, stretched eastward from their feet until lost in the shadows of Buffalo Butte, and not yet had Toomey's accustomed ear been able to detect the faint, whirring, song of the rails that tells of the coming of far-distant, thundering wheels. "She's late again,"

said Toomey, uneasily. "We should have heard her whistling for Spearman's Ranch five minutes ago, and I wanted to pull you out of Argenta before seven o'clock."

"You still think I'm not grimy enough," said Geordie, with a grin. "I can lay on a coat of coal-dust—"

"'Tisn't that," came the murmured answer, with a shake of the head. "It's the back and shoulders, sir. You couldn't turn yourself hindside-foremost, could you, and get your chest between your shoulder-blades?"

"I can cultivate a stoop," said Geordie, with a forward hunch of the shoulders. "But there you go with that 'sir' again. We're in uniform, but not that of the cavalry. You'll betray me yet, Toomey, if you're not careful. Now, about the stoop—"

"It might do, s—, if you could keep it, but from the time you came to Reynolds you were the straightest boy in the garrison, and now, with four years at West Point, you've got a back on you flat as a board. That's what's going to queer us in passing you off for a kid fireman. It was hard enough going

through before it was fairly light. Now, unless No. 4 gets in in five minutes, the sun will be lighting the length of the shed at Argenta, and we've got cars to cut out there, too. Confound No. 4!"

And then a certain superfluous lantern, bleary with a night of service, came dawdling up the side of the train, and the conductor hove in sight, watch in hand. "Four left Argenta on time," said he to the engineer. "What the mischief keeps her? She ought to have gone by five minutes ago. Who's yonder with Toomey?"

"Friend of his; young feller from Chimney, learning firing. Old man's orders," he added, at sight of rebuke in the conductor's eyes. "Told me himself to take him along and give him a show."

The conductor set his lantern down near the fore truck of the tender. He did not half like it that a superior should give orders to his engineer that did not come through him. He had been a soldier in his day and accustomed to military ways of doing things. He was already chafing over a delay that would

bring him behind time to Argenta. Now he was nettled at this apparent slight. "When did he tell you, and where?" was the demand. "He was at Denver the last I saw of him."

"He ran out to the Springs on No. 5; passed you at Monument, probably; spoke to me at the round-house about ten o'clock." And having thus summarily settled the matter, Big Ben clambered sulkily once more into the cab.

The conductor made a grimace expressive of much disgust. Presently he turned, left his lantern by the side of the engine, and then came angering on to the switch. He decided to see for himself what the stranger was like.

In the gray light of the dawn the two young men, one of them stockily, strongly built, the other very slender and erect, were absorbed in eager talk. Not until the conductor was within five yards of them did Graham note his coming and signal "Hush." Abruptly came the challenge:

"'Ain't you heard her whistle yet,

Toomey?" and the tone implied that sheer neglect could be the only explanation for Toomey's failure in case no whistle had been heard.

"Nary whistle," was the indifferent answer.

"Well, how could you expect to hear it? You were talking a blue streak." And while the conductor's rebuke was levelled at Toomey, his sombre eyes were on Graham.

"Doing that to keep awake," was the blunt reply. "Haven't been to bed for thirty hours."

"That's nothing. In my day a-soldiering we didn't get to bed once a week. That's when we was after Morgan. You regulars couldn't stand that, I s'pose."

"In my day we didn't get to bed once a month," answered Toomey, with equal truth. "That was when we was after Sittin' Bull. The volunteers that started on *that* chase petered out at Powder River."

The conductor sniffed. It had been give and take 'twixt him and Toomey ever since the discovery that each had served in the cavalry. Beaten thus far in the battle of

chaff, the conductor tried another as he studied Geordie with unfriendly eyes.

"Got a kid fireman here—'nother of y'r officers' dog-robbers?" he demanded.

Toomey whirled on him in an instant, in spite of Geordie's quick-gripping hand. "You're boss on this train, Cullin," said he, savagely, "and you know I can't jaw back as you deserve, but if Bob Anthony happens to be where he can hear of *that* remark, you'll get your time or *I'm* a liar."

For a moment Cullin stood and glared, wrath and humiliation commingling. Graham it was who quickly stepped forward and interposed.

"Yes, I'm playing kid fireman, Mr. Cullin," said he, quietly, "and I was told by the division superintendent if any trouble arose to give this to the conductor," whereat he held forth a card on the back of which dimly appeared some written words. Over these Cullin glanced, unappeased, until he came to the last line and signature. Then a curious change swept slowly over his face. He looked Graham carefully, doubtfully

from head to foot, slowly thrust the card in a waistcoat-pocket, and was turning silently away when Geordie hailed him, a ready smile on his young face.

"I'll trouble you for the card," said he. "I may meet *other* conductors."

Slowly Cullin fumbled for it, twiddled it between his fingers, and finally, half reluctant, restored it. At that instant, faint, distant, but distinct, came the sound of the whistle of the belated No. 4. "That's for Spearman's now," thought Geordie, but so tense had been the scene that for a moment no man spoke.

Then Toomey gave tongue.

"She'll go by here kiting," said he. "Ten miles down-grade and a two-mile straight-away from Cimarron Bend, out yonder." Again the whistle, and nearer. "That's for the crossing at the creek. By gad, she's just jumping! Hang onto your hair when you see her head-light and scramble for the cab."

Another whistle, two short blasts and a long. Nearer still, yet still out of sight; and then presently there shot into view, over

a mile away to the west, even though the gray light of the summer's dawn now overspread the landscape, the glare of a headlight. It was No. 4 coming full tilt.

And then—surprise! From steam-drum and 'scape-valve jetted clouds of flat-driven steam. No. 4 had suddenly "shut off," and was now coasting downhill like a huge toboggan.

Another blast came from the whistle. "By Jove, she's going to stop!" said Cullin. "What on earth's the meaning of that?"

With prodigious shriek and roar of steam, with clinching, crunching air-brakes on the glistening tires, with sparks flying from the whirring wheels and signal-lanterns swinging at the side, No. 4 came rushing in. As the baggage-car shot by, a little group of men stood by the doorway about a recumbent figure, and the conductor whisked up his lantern and started after it. When nearly opposite the caboose the big train settled to a stop. Four pairs of strong arms lifted the prostrate figure from one car to the other. There were brief, hurried words. A lantern

waved; the whistle sounded two quick blasts; No. 4 slowly started, quickly gained speed, and, almost as quickly as it came, was steaming away for Buffalo Butte, its pale lamps gleaming dimly in the gathering light. The conductor came running forward.

"Pull out for Argenta, Ben!" he shouted. "Say, young feller, drop shovelling and come back. I've got nobody to help me, and here No. 4's loaded me with a half-dead man to be taken home. There's a row at the mines. Every man is out from Silver Shield!"

CHAPTER VI

FIRST AID TO THE WOUNDED

SLOWLY, jerkily, the Time Freight began to gather headway as the big Mogul pulled, hissing loudly, from the siding to the main track, the ugly brown cars winding grudgingly after. This was before the days of mile-long freight-trains with air-brakes and patent couplers. Over the grades of the Transcontinental no engine yet had pulled more than twenty "empties." There was ever the danger of breaking in two. In the dim interior of the caboose the conductor, with Geordie Graham by his side, was bending over a battered and dishevelled form. As the rear trucks went clicking over the switch-points, the former sprang to the open doorway to see that his brakeman reset and locked the switch, and with a swift run overtook the caboose and swung himself aboard.

"I'll be up in a minute, Andy," cried Cullin to his aid, already scrambling up the iron ladder for his station on the roof. "This poor devil's battered into pulp and I can't leave him." And again he was by Graham's side—Graham who, kneeling now and sponging with cold water the bruised, hacked, disfigured face of the senseless victim, had made a startling discovery.

Here, with his clothing ripped, torn, and covered with dirt and blood, with one arm obviously broken and his head beaten, kicked, and cruelly gashed—here, beyond a doubt, lay the man who nearly five years earlier had been the one obstacle between him and the goal of his ambition, the cadetship at West Point; here lay the son of the man probably most prominent in the conspiracy against the absent shareholders of Silver Shield; here, in fine, lay the almost lifeless body of the youth he had seen spying upon their arrival at Denver—young Breifogle himself.

By this time the Mogul was grinding her way up the track, in determined effort to land

the Time Freight in the yards at Argenta before the whistle blew for seven o'clock. It was a twelve-mile pull up-grade, every inch of the way — twisting, turning, and tunnelling, as has been said—and the caboose reeled and swayed from side to side as it rounded the reverse curves and swung at the tail of the train. Cullin, lantern in hand, had climbed to his seat in the lookout.

"I've got to be up here," he explained, "till we are through the tunnels. Do what you can. I suppose sponging is all we *can* do."

Graham nodded. He had stripped the leather-covered cushion from the conductor's chair, and with this and a rolled coat made a support for the senseless head. He had a fire-bucket of cold water, and even as he plied the wet sponge and sought to stanch the trickling blood, his wits were at work. The men on No. 4 had only time to say that four miles out from Argenta, down the Run beyond Narrow Gauge Junction, their whistle suddenly shrieked, the air-brakes were set with a clamp that jolted the whole train,

and they slowed down just enough not to knock into flinders a hand-car that was sailing ahead of them, down-grade. "The pilot hit it a lick that tossed it into the ditch," No. 4's crew had explained, and beside it they had found—this.

And "this" it was now Geordie's task and duty to keep alive until they could turn it over to competent hands at Argenta. "This," which others failed to know, he had recognized. "This" it was for him to make known, yet in so doing he might betray himself and the purpose of his coming, and so undo every hope and plan he had made. There was no Toomey to help him now—no devoted ex-trooper and friend to back him. Engineer, fireman, conductor, and brakemen, every man of the crew had to be at his post as the freight panted away up the winding mountain road. The crew of No. 4 had searched the pockets in vain for a clew as to the injured man's identity. Everything was gone. His assailants had seen to that. Not a scrap had been found that could account for him. Even the shirt "tab" bore no initials;

the watch-pocket of the trousers bore no name. The garments had been purchased ready-made and gave no sign.

Then there was another matter to be considered. Badly as he was battered and bruised, the man was not dying. Graham knew how to test the pulse, and its strength told him not to fear. The chances were that his patient would return to consciousness before very long. Then recognition of his grimy attendant would probably follow. Breifogle was no fool, as Graham remembered, and a fireman's black cap and sooty shirt and overalls would be but scant disguise.

And to carry out his plan it was essential that he should pass through Argenta, reach Hatch's Cove and eventually the Silver Shield mine, and reach this latter unknown and unsuspected. Toomey and he had hit on a plan—once Toomey could succeed in getting word to Nolan. But that, reasoned Geordie, might be impossible now in view of this new complication—serious trouble at the mines, and "every man out at Silver Shield."

If only he could see Toomey again for a moment! That was impossible. Toomey's every muscle was needed to keep that fiery and insatiable monster fed with fuel every rod of the way to Argenta. There was no intermediate stop. There could be no signals — no sending of a message. Half the distance had they gone, panting and straining, barely fifteen miles to the hour. Broad daylight, and then the rejoicing sunshine, had come to cheer and gladden and revive, and Cullin shouted inquiry, as he bent down from his perch, and Graham nodded or shook his head by way of reply. Swiftly and scientifically he kept up the play of the sponges; shook his head to Cullin's suggestion of a little more whiskey—the frontier's "first aid" for every kind of mishap. The pulse said there was no further need of it, at the moment at least. And then, as they rumbled over some resounding bridge-work and crossed the swift and foaming Run, the train crept under the shadow of the cliff and stretched away over a bit of open, undulating grassland, and then the racket ceased for a

while and it was possible, by bending down, to catch the patient's breathing.

And it gave Geordie an idea.

The poor, bruised head was turning in restless pain; the puffed and swollen lips were moving; the still unconscious man was muttering. Not a word could Geordie distinguish. It was all guesswork. But, glancing up at Cullin, he called: "He's trying to talk. Perhaps I can get his name," and again inclined his ear and bent down over the luckless fellow's face. "Yes," he said, loudly, so that Cullin could hear—"yes, I understand. . . . Don't worry. . . . You're with friends. . . . Tell us your name and home. . . What? Try once again. . . . Bry—what? Oh, Breifogle? . . . Yes. Argenta? That's just where we're going. We'll be there very soon. Don't try to talk more now." And again the sponge was busily plied, and then the grimy nurse glanced upward at Cullin, now shinning down from his perch in the skylight. "His home's right ahead at Argenta. Breifogle's the name."

"Breifogle!" shouted Cullin, aghast.

"Why, that's the big brewer, banker, mine-owner, and Lord knows what all—that owns half of Yampah County and wants to own the rest. Could he tell who slugged him? Does he know anything about it? Ask him."

Obediently Geordie put the question, but no answer came. "Seems to have wandered off," he said. "Perhaps we'd be wise to worry him with no more questions. If he's what you say, they'll be looking everywhere for him. When did the men at Silver Shield go out?"

"Yesterday morning at ten o'clock," so they said on No. 4. There was a pack of 'em come down to Argenta to get to the owners, they said. By gad, they seem to have got *at* one of 'em!"

A moan from the sufferer was the only answer. Graham shook his head. "How soon can you make it?" he asked. "The sooner this man's in expert hands the better 'twill be."

"Twelve minutes," said Cullin, with a snap of his silver watch-lid. "*You* seem no slouch of a handler yourself. Where'd you learn?"

"I lived with a doctor awhile," was the quiet answer. "He had to patch men up occasion-

ally." And Geordie could barely suppress the grin that twitched the corners of his mouth. How strangely already his adventure was faring! "I suppose after hammering him senseless they set him adrift on that hand-car, hoping it would finish him and hide their crime," he hazarded.

"Looks like it," was Cullin's short answer as once more he climbed to his station.

Ten minutes later they were slowly trundling in among a maze of tracks and sidings, with long trains of gondolas, coal-cars, and dingy-brown freight-boxes on both sides. Cullin was shouting to invisible switchmen, and presently the train came bumping to a stand. Another minute and two or three early birds among the yardmen were climbing aboard and curiously, excitedly, peering over Geordie's head. He never looked up. Calmly he continued his sponging. Then Cullin's voice was heard again. A stretcher was thrust in at the rear door. Three or four men, roughly dressed, but with sorrow and sympathy in their care-worn faces, bent over the prostrate body.

"BIG BEN WAS BUSY WITH HIS OIL-CAN"

They seemed to look to Graham for instructions.

"You know where to take him?" he asked. "All right, then, I'll leave him with you." And before the station-master or other official could come, Graham had seen his patient transferred to the stretcher, borne forth into the sunshine and away to the passenger-room. Then, slipping from the left rear steps, with the train between him and the building, Geordie sauntered, softly whistling, up to the front again, and in five minutes was helping Toomey at the cab.

It was not yet seven. Big Ben was busy with his oil-can. Three cars had been cut out from the train and run to a platform close at hand. It was high time they were off again, but the conductor was held in the office, whither he had gone for orders, as well as to report concerning their unsought passenger. Toomey was still angered against Cullin, between whom and himself there was ever more or less friction, but Geordie had begun to take a fancy to him. Cullin would never have said what he did had he

known the identity of Toomey's pupil, and Geordie argued that Cullin's gruff and insolent greeting was in reality a tribute to his powers — a recognition of the fact that he looked the part he was trying to play.

With so very much at stake depending on Graham's remaining unrecognized, with old Fort Reynolds only six miles ahead, and Silver Shield only twenty-six farther, it would be foolish to become involved in a squabble. But Toomey had been nursing his wrath. Big Ben was not too fond of Cullin, and Geordie found that they were quite bent on making trouble at first opportunity. In spite of the early hour an air of excitement pervaded the station. Many men were idling about the passenger platform, and here and there little groups could be seen in muttered conversation. There was no laughter, no light-hearted chaff. It was noted by both men in the cab, before Geordie rejoined them, that as the injured man was borne on his stretcher across the yard into the passenger station, these groups

seemed rather to edge away instead of crowding about in morbid curiosity.

No need to ask who or what they were. The pallor of the faces, so startling in contrast to the healthy tan of the ranch folk or the swarthy grime of the railway men—the mud-splashed boots and trousers told their tale. They were miners to a man, and miners in ugly mood.

"The town's been full of 'em since noon yesterday," said a yardman to Ben, in answer to his question. "They are here to see the Silver Shield officers, and have been told they'd be up from Denver on No. 3. They chased old Breifogle out of his office yesterday afternoon, and he's been hiding ever since. Young Breifogle has been missing ever since yesterday noon."

"That's him on the stretcher," said Big Ben, gloomily, for the news was already flying round. "Cullin says he's about done for. This young feller in here took care of him all the way up from Buffalo Butte. No. 4 picked him up down the gulch and put him aboard us there."

A long whistle was the only comment. At the first words spoken by the yardman, a quick glance passed between the two young men on the opposite, the fireman's, side of the cab. They could not see the speaker, but they knew the voice. It was that of a former trooper of the —th, another soldier who had sought to treble his savings at the mines and had lost them all; then, too proud to return and "take on" again, had found starvation-wages at Argenta.

"Stay here," whispered Toomey, "and keep sittin'." Then, wiping his hands on a wad of waste, and with an affable grin on his face, he swung over behind Ben and leaned out of the cab.

"Hullo, Scotty! Any of our fellers in that outfit?"

"Hullo, Toomey! None of 'em with *that* gang, but there's three of 'em came, and old Nolan's head of the whole caboodle. He's their cap' and spokesman."

"Nolan! Nolan here?" cried Toomey, in great excitement, while Geordie felt his heart beating hard.

"Nolan, as big as life and twice as wicked."

CHAPTER VII

A BALKED ARREST

FOR a moment Graham's spirits sank like lead. Nolan, the stanch old soldier who had been his foremost trooper friend and guide, was the man of all others on whom he pinned his faith, on whose help he had relied, and upon whose loyalty and devotion he was ready to stake his every hope of success. And now—so said this former soldier and comrade—now Nolan was here in Argenta, instead of up at the mines, here with a mob of strikers, their leader and spokesman, chief of the crew, possibly, that had nearly done to death the son of one of the principal directors of Silver Shield.

That Breifogle was his father's enemy, and a leading spirit in the plot to rob him, Geordie Graham knew full well. That Breifogle the younger had been sent to Denver

to watch for the coming of Dr. Graham, McCrea, or others of the officers, all of whom he knew by sight and name, there was every reason to believe; but that Nolan should take part in or countenance the mobbing of the Breifogles, or any others of the mine-owners, was abhorrent, if not impossible.

Now for the moment Geordie longed for the presence of McCrea, who had remained in Denver in hopes of bringing local officials to their senses and his terms. And McCrea, for his part, was at the same moment wishing to Heaven he had followed Geordie's lead and pushed ahead for the field of battle. The Denverite members of the board, warned of his presence, had easily managed to elude him, and with others were now on their way to Argenta for a special meeting, while McCrea was still held at a distance, lured by an appointment for a conference to come off that very morning at eleven, long three hours after the other conferees had vanished from town.

But no older head was there to advise. Graham alone, representing the aggrieved

shareholders, was at the scene of action. He could take counsel with no man on the ground. Win or lose he must decide and act for himself. Here he sat in the cab of the Mogul, impatient only five minutes back to push ahead for the mines, to get away without recognition. Now it might well be that the point at which to act was right here in town.

"The mine is being operated at heavy expense and loss," had been the latest wail from the secretary. "There is not ore enough in sight to begin to pay the wages of the men. Yet every test convinces us that abundant results must follow further development." Another assessment, therefore, on top of all previous levies, had been the imperative demand. Geordie did not know it, but that pound was the last that broke the hold of three. They had sold their stock for what it would bring, and Breifogle and his clique were laughing in their sleeves. They knew there was ore in abundance, both in sight and touch. Geordie and McCrea believed it, and believed that if the one could

establish the fact, and the other could bring the directors to book with proof of foul measures to squeeze out the small shareholders, victory would be in their hands.

But what was to be done now? By this time the fact that young Breifogle had been fearfully beaten must be known to every man about the station, and was swiftly racing to the opening doors of every shop, office, and homestead in town. By this act the miners had destroyed every hope of sympathy, or even, possibly, of justice. Whatever their grievance it could not warrant murder. But what *was* their grievance? What could have precipitated trouble at the mines and a wholesale walkout at Silver Shield? What could have brought the miners, nearly a hundred strong, here to Argenta, with Nolan at their head—Nolan, who had been the company's faithful servant, the best manager of men, the most level-headed and reliable "boss" at the Silver Shield?

Toomey's friend had hurried away, for sound of increasing excitement came from the groups, now merging into one, about the

telegraph office. Big Ben swung himself out of the cab once more, and with arms akimbo stood watching the distant gathering, wishing Cullin would come with orders or else with explanation of the delay. This left Graham and Toomey alone in the cab, and Toomey's first question was, "What can you do now, sir?"

"Find Nolan," was the brief answer, "and get to the bottom of this."

"Orders may come any minute," said Toomey, looking anxiously over his shoulder. "We'll have to pull out and go ahead. You couldn't—stay here at Argenta, could you?"

"I may *have* to. Here's Cullin now."

"But no orders," said Toomey, with a gasp of relief, for from far over the tracks, catching sight of his watchful engineer, Cullin had waved his hand, palm towards them, twice to and fro, a gesture so like the Indian sign "No go" that Geordie knew its meaning at a glance. Silently they awaited his coming and listened, breathless, for his tidings when he came.

"What's the row about?" asked Ben, as Cullin reached them, breathing hard.

"Why, about their boss, it seems. The company gave him the bounce yesterday, and ordered him off the premises. He demanded fair play and a hearing, and then young Breifogle, who had gone up with the order for his discharge, began abusing him. Nolan—that's the man's name—called him down, and then Breifogle broke loose and cursed him, called him traitor and all manner of names, and ordered some of his men to throw him out. They did it, too, and brought on a fight. Breifogle and his friends were armed and the men were not. They shot two miners, arrested the 'ringleaders,' as they called 'em, and locked 'em up. Then the men quit the mine and laid for Breifogle when he tried to get out. He hired a rig and drove t'other way, out to Miners' Joy, slid out on the Narrow Gauge last night, and there was a dozen of 'em headed him off down at the Junction. Nolan and his crowd had come down here to see the directors and get their rights. Of course some of them did it, and there you are!"

"Where's Nolan now?" asked Toomey.

"Where *is* he? Over at the company's office waiting for the directors, when he ought to be making tracks for Mexico."

Graham's heart had been beating harder with every word. It bounded with wrath as he listened to this, yet listened in silence and stern self-control. But Toomey got a dig in the ribs that plainly said, "Make him say why."

"'Twouldn't be like Long Nolan to be skipping when he's needed by his friends," growled Toomey. "He's no quitter, if he *was* at Powder River," whereby it was Cullin's turn to get a dig, and little did he relish it.

"That's another I owe you, Toomey," said he, "and we'll settle it by-and-by. Just now I'm thinking for your friend, if you are not. I knew him before ever you did, and would go ten miles to your one to help him. What you haven't sense enough to see is, that it won't be an hour before the sheriff's after him with a warrant, and if Breifogle dies he'll swing, sure as death. He was raving when they threw him out of the gate, and swore he would get even with Breifogle,

and when it comes to trial there'll be a dozen witnesses to swear that he *did*. What kind of a trial do you think he'd have here at Argenta, with half the town owned by Breifogle & Co.?"

This was, indeed, putting a new face on it, and still Graham listened in silence, trying to control the quiver and tingle of his nerves.

There came a sudden call from the office. Shoving his way through the little mass of miners on the platform, the station-agent stepped to the edge and waved a hand to Cullin, but the hand was empty. The release order had not come. The big Mogul and the freight were still held, and now it was much after seven, and Argenta all astir. Cullin turned doggedly away. He seemed to know what was coming and did not half like it. Leaping down from the platform and striding over the cinder-blackened ties, the agent met him before he crossed the second track—met him and spoke in tone so low even Big Ben could not hear. All three men at the cab, they could not help it, were listening eagerly. It was easy to see, how-

ever, that the station-master was seeking information Cullin could not or dared not give. Every gesture, the upheaved shoulders, the sideward droop of the head, the forward toss of the hands, palms to the front, all as much as said, "Don't ask me." Then the agent turned slowly away, walked a dozen steps, looked back, and called:

"I'll tell 'em what you say, but you'd better come yourself. Narrow Gauge 'll get 'the Old Man' on the wire presently, then you'll have to. I'm betting they hold you here till you do."

"Not if I know myself or — my orders," growled Cullin, as he returned, black-browed, to the cab.

"What's up?" asked Big Ben, presently, seeing that the conductor waited to be asked.

"Why, those Narrow Gauge fellows — they're owned here, you know — claim that two of their men were shot by the same gang that did up Breifogle. They're wiring both ways from the Junction, up here for sheriff and detectives, and down to the Springs for Bob

Anthony. They say No. 4 and I both know things about the slugging we haven't told. They say No. 4 took three of the sluggers away, and that we're hiding some to take up into the mountains and turn 'em loose where they'll be safe. The only man with us is—this kid," and Cullin looked up darkly into the cab, his gloomy eyes on Geordie's coal-blackened face.

Now, indeed, it was time for action, and, quietly as he could, Geordie put the question:

"Did you tell them you had a stranger in the cab?"

"Told 'em you were the only thing—or kind—I had."

"But you told them I'd come all the way with you from Chimney Switch, did you not?"

"I didn't tell 'em anything except what I said to Folder here—the station-master. I told 'em, through him, if they wanted anything on this train they needn't ask me. I wasn't responsible."

Graham and Toomey exchanged quick glances. A wretched end would it be to all

their planning if Geordie should now be dragged off the cab as accessory to the assault on young Breifogle, his helpless charge and patient of the early morning hours.

Yet that was just what now was likely to happen. Resentful of there being a mystery about the cab, a secret he was not allowed to share—an outsider made known by Cullin's superiors to Cullin's subordinates, yet not presented to him—true to human nature Cullin had told what Geordie would conceal. In less than no time the enemy would know 705 had brought a stranger within their gates who was too wary to come by passenger-train. In less than ten minutes they might be there with a warrant for his arrest.

And at that very moment there went up a shout from the group of miners at the office. One of their kind had come running in, breathless and alarmed. Three or four words only had he spoken, but they were enough. As one man the twoscore turned and ran for the broad street beyond the passenger station, were swallowed up in the gap between the express and baggage sheds and the passenger

waiting-rooms, and could be heard shouting loudly beyond the high board fence—a chorus of cheers that seemed to start near the main entrance and went travelling on the wings of the wind westward up the lively street.

And a moment later, even while they were wondering, out came "Folder here," the agent—this time paper in hand and waving for Cullin. "Orders at last," said Cullin, and sprang to get them. And this time both Graham and Toomey swung from the cab and eagerly followed. "Warrant out for Nolan!" they heard Folder say, "but they'll not get him here. The gang has whisked him away to the Fort and beyond, I reckon; and the sheriff who goes to Silver Shield takes his life in his hands." Then his eyes fell on the two firemen. "One of *you's* wanted," he added, "but I don't know which, and they're coming now."

He pointed down the yard toward the east entrance. Almost on the run, two men came hurrying in. Toomey grabbed Geordie's sleeve. "They sha'n't have you *here*, anyhow. Jump for the cab." And jump they

did, all three. Moved now by some indefinable sympathy he had not felt before, Cullin urged them on, and thrust the order into Big Ben's hairy fist as it swung from the window. Ben gave one glance, his left hand grasping the lever; Toomey made a flying leap for the bell-cord; Geordie scrambled in after; hiss went the steam-cocks; clang went the bell, and with an explosive cough that shook her big frame almost free of the rails the Mogul heaved slowly ahead. The shortened "Time Freight" picked up its heels and came jerkily after, and with her ponderous drivers rolling swifter and swifter, and the heavy panting speedily changing to short, quick, and quickening puffs, faster and faster big 705 swung clear of the switch-points, smoothly rounded to the main line, and with its dozen brown chickens following close, Indian file, after the fussy old hen in the lead, away went the fast freight, flaunting its green flags at the rear in the face of the pursuit, and the deputies drew up disgusted at the edge of the yard, their signals and their shouts unheeded.

CHAPTER VIII

A RACE TO THE FORT

THREE miles out and the Mogul's six drivers were spinning like so many tops. Flat along the grimy roofs of the heaving freight-cars behind, the cloud of coal smoke from her stunted chimney fled rearward until clear of the train, then drifted idly across the rolling uplands. Ahead and to right and left, distant, snow-capped summits barred the sky-line. On either side the gray-green slopes, bare and treeless, billowed away, higher and higher toward the range, with here and there a bunch of fattening cattle gazing stupidly at the invaders of their peace and quietude. Close at hand to the left the murky waters of the stream flashed quickly by. Close at hand to the right the hard-beaten prairie road meandered over the sod. There had been a ridge or two and

"NOT A WHIFF OF THE DRAUGHT COULD BE WASTED"

some sharp curves just west of town, and now, as they rounded the last of these and flew out upon an almost level track, the bottom of some prehistoric mountain lake, the eyes of two of the three silent occupants of the cab were strained along the gleaming rails ahead, and almost at the same instant the same thought sprang to the lips of each—Big Ben, with his left hand at the throttle, hunched up on his shelf, his cap pulled down over the bushy brows, and Geordie, across the cab on the fireman's seat, clinging to the window-frame to withstand the lurching of the throbbing monster, while between them, on the coal-blackened floor, Toomey, with his big shovel flinging open the iron gate to the blazing furnace for every new mouthful he fed it, and snapping it shut when he turned away for another, for not a whiff of the draught could be wasted. Once past the deserted station at the Fort there would come eight miles of twisting and turning and struggling up-grade, and every pound of steam would be needed to pull even this baker's dozen of heavily laden cars now thundering merrily along behind.

Only two short, smooth miles ahead lay the low ridge that formed the eastern boundary of the old reservation. Beyond it, on the broad *mesa*, stood the buildings of the frontier garrison, once Geordie's home and refuge. The tall flag-staff came suddenly into view, and in less than four minutes they would be rushing by. Over forty miles to the hour were they flying now. Big Ben had just let out another notch as they swung into the two-mile tangent, when at the same instant he and Geordie caught sight of three or four black dots dimly bobbing in the midst of a little dust-cloud on the roadway far ahead, and almost at the same instant came from each the low cry, "There they are!"

Toomey dropped his shovel and glanced forward over Ben's burly shoulder, then, grabbing the vertical handrails on cab and tender, leaned out and gazed astern. The wagon road twisted over the bleak "divide" the train had just rounded, and, barring a team or two jogging slowly into town, was bare of traffic. "No chasers so far," he shouted, as he again stooped to his tools.

"No chasers but us could catch 'em," growled Ben. " We'll give 'em a toot of the whistle!" he shouted across to Geordie, and the steam blast shrieked through the keen morning air in obedience to the quick pull at the cord.

And now 705 was fairly flying, the green flags at the rear flattened like shingles in the whistling wind, and a cloud of mingled dust and smoke rolling furiously after the caboose. Big Ben had "pulled her wide open," and under full head of steam the powerful engine tore like a black meteor up the glistening track. In eagerness and excitement almost uncontrollable George Graham clung to his perch and gazed with all his eyes. Barely a mile ahead now spurred the fugitives, his old friend Nolan in their midst—Nolan whom he had come all those miles to see!

And then a strange thing happened. So far from finding reassurance, friendship, sympathy in the whistle blast, the riders had read the very opposite. So far from slackening speed and letting the signalling train come

up on them, they had suddenly veered to the left, the south, and, bending low like jockies over their coursers' manes, they shot across the track, dived down into the pebbly bottom, and the next thing Geordie saw they were plunging breast-deep through the brown and heaving torrent, the waters foaming at their knees.

"Might 'a' known it!" bellowed Toomey, disgusted. "'Course they reason we've got the sheriff and posse aboard, and they're taking the short-cut to the—you know," he said, with a sudden significant gulp, to Geordie, and a warning glance at Ben. Even now that he had left the trooper habits months behind, Toomey could not forget or disregard trooper ethics. Ben might be friendly to Nolan, just as he claimed, but—would Ben keep other's secrets?

And even under his coat of coal and tan Geordie's face blazed suddenly. As a lad whom the troopers knew and loved and trusted, he could not help knowing in by-gone days of the ranch just south of the post—"Saints' Rest," they called it, laughingly—

the shack owned and occupied by an old soldier with a numerous family: the rendezvous for many a revel, the resting-place of many a hunting-party, the refuge of many a home-bound squad of "the boys," before the days of the canteen that brought comfort and temperance into the army for the short but blessed spell of its existence—boys just back from an unhallowed frolic in town, and not yet sober enough to face their first sergeant and "the Old Man" at the orderly room. Oh, wonderful things were told of old Shiner and his ranch! In the eyes of some straitlaced commanders he had been little better than a receiver of stolen goods, a soldier Shylock who loaned moneys at usurious interest, a gambler who fleeced the trooper folk of their scanty pay, a dispenser of bad liquors and worse morals. Some truth there may have been in some of these tales, yet Shiner had been a strangely useful man. He supplied the post with milk and cream, butter and eggs, of better quality and lower price than could possibly be had in town. He knew the best hunting and fishing on

the range. He had teams and "rigs" at all times at the service of officers and soldiers, when the post ambulance was forbidden by an unfeeling government. He had a corral and stockade that had more than once bidden stout defiance to both the law and the lawless. He had, so the fort children firmly believed, a subterranean passage from his stockade to the sentry-lines. He was hated by both sheriff and sutler in days when the latter lived and thrived; he overreached the one, undersold the other, and outwitted both. He befriended every soldier in a scrape, whether the offence were against the majestic letter of the civil law or only the unimportant spirit of the military. In the eyes of the few he was much of a sinner; in the eyes of the many no less of a saint; and, after careful casting up of accounts, the colonel of the —th Cavalry had declared Shiner far more good than bad, treated him accordingly, and won a surprised and devoted friend and ally. Another officer Shiner swore by was Dr. Graham, and for reasons similar to those of his fellow, and farther-distant, ranchman Ross.

Yet Geordie had often heard of mysterious doings at Shiner's that would not bear official investigation—had heard and kept silent. In those days Shiner dwelt close under the sheltering wing of a sympathetic garrison. Now, if still there, he must be living in the light, and for the first time it dawned upon Geordie that what he heard of Shiner in bygone days and kept to himself, he could not hear and know and keep to himself now. It was one thing to be a garrison boy; it was another to be an officer in the army of the United States.

The instant that it dawned upon him that Nolan and his friends were heading across country for Shiner's old plant, riding hard in the belief that they were pursued by rail, it flashed upon him that he could not join Nolan there—indeed, he must, if a possible thing, guide or direct him elsewhere.

Already the pursued were through the ford and, with dripping flanks, were scrambling up the opposite shore. Already big 705 was almost abreast of them, and in another moment would be swiftly speeding by.

It was two years since Geordie last set eyes on Nolan, but there was no mistaking, even at that distance, the tall, gaunt figure and the practised seat in saddle. Behind him trailed three comrades, two of whom, at least, were tyros in the art of horsemanship. They were hanging on for dear life as their steeds labored on after the leader. The object of all four was obviously to get beyond easy rifle range of the rushing train before drawing rein to reconnoitre, and now, probably noting that the engine was driving on full speed, with no sign of stopping, the tall horseman in the lead circled swiftly to his right, along the crest of a low ridge perhaps three hundred yards away, then peered from under his broad hatbrim at the supposed enemy.

And then it was that Graham and Toomey, both, sprang back to the coal-pile in the tender, clambered high as possible on the shifting slope, and, balancing as best they could, whipped off their caps, swung them joyously about their heads, and eagerly gave the old-time, well-known cavalry signal, "Forward!" "Forward!" They saw Nolan

and his friends seated on their panting horses, staring after them in amaze and wonderment, then resolutely following.

A mile now would bring them whistling by the site of old Fort Reynolds, and a lump rose in Geordie's throat, for the weather-beaten, ramshackle stables came in view as the Mogul rounded a long, easy curve, and there, beyond them and on the level bench before them, stood the trim rows of officers' quarters, now deserted and tenantless, yet guarded by the single sergeant and his little squad of men. To the right, afar up the track near the foot-bridge and ford, lay the station building, wellnigh useless now since the greater interests and industries, that had made the railway possible and forced the Indian farther back, had also fouled the mountain stream and spoiled the site for a cavalry post.

There stood the freight sheds; there were the chutes for horses and mules; there, beyond them, the now abandoned office and waiting-room; and there, still glistening white and towering, the semaphore signal-mast of

the railway; and then and there, sure and sudden, there dropped the black arm straight across and above their glistening path in the never-to-be-neglected order—Stop!

Big Ben's lined face went swiftly gray through its coat of grime, but the firm hand did its instant work with the throttle. Then, swinging from his seat, he grasped the glistening lever and, peering intently forward, stood ready to throw it in reverse. Toomey sprang for the cord and jerked one fierce toot out of the whistle, the old-time signal for down-brakes before Westinghouse and his science put everything at the touch of the engineer. Almost at the moment the swift rush of the train became jarring and rough. Two daring men scampered, monkey-like, along the top of the cars, twisting a brake on each, then darting to the next. A furious gust of steam tore from the escape-valve and streamed away overhead. Not a thing was in sight on the track, not a soul on the platform, to account for the alarming signal. A switch-target clanked as they tore over the points; a vagrant dog scurried away toward the

once thriving saloon, and not until they drove in, hissing, grinding, and bumping, to the side of the dusty platform, did Ben's keen eyes catch sight of two herdsmen's horses—cow ponies—tethered back of the shanty beside the saloon, and up went the lid of his box at the instant, in went his right hand, and then out it came full grasp on a brown-barrelled six-shooter.

CHAPTER IX

BAD NEWS FROM THE MINES

"A HOLD-UP," muttered Toomey, as, obedient to Big Ben's orders, "Duck, you two!" he and Geordie crouched for the moment in the dark interior of the cab. But who would hold up a freight bound to, not away from, the mines? Twice, thrice, indeed, since the cavalry had been sent from Fort Reynolds, the overland express had been flagged between Argenta and Summit Siding, and masked men had boarded the train, despoiled the passengers and Pullmans; and once old Shiner had come under suspicion because certain plunder was found at his place.

"The robbers are discharged soldiers," swore the sheriff of Yampah; "their haunt is at Shiner's." Yet not so much as a scrap of other evidence was there found. Shiner threw open his doors to the officers, bade

them search high and low, declared upon honor as he would upon oath that he himself had found the damaging evidence—two pocket-books and some valueless papers—on the open prairie a mile from his place the day after the third of the "hold-ups." There had long been bad blood betwixt him and the sheriff, and this time the man of the law gave the lie, and but for prompt work of bystanders—deputy Shiners and sheriffs both—there would have been cause for a coroner's inquest on the spot. Before that day it had been avowed hostility between them; now it was war to the knife. Much of this was known to the men of the railway, who sided according to their lights. Few of them knew Shiner; many knew the sheriff. It was patent at a glance that Big Ben held to the views of the latter and looked upon Shiner's hand, or Shiner's hands, as the cause of the hold-up. Nor was he entirely wrong. Even as Cullin came running up the track from the rear of the train, and brakemen running atop of it, eager to learn the cause of the stop, two men with saddle-bags slung over

the left arm stepped out from behind the passenger depot and met the conductor halfway. Glancing back, Ben caught sight of them and, pistol in hand, started to swing from the engine, crying "Come on!" to Toomey. Springing to his feet, Toomey gave one look back to the platform. His keen eyes danced with excitement and joy. "Hold on!" he shouted to Ben. "It's all right. Lay low," he whispered to Geordie. "It's Shiner himself!"

And old Shiner it was, cool, quiet, pale, resolute in face of a furious conductor and a threatening crew—Shiner, presently backed by a sergeant of regulars and two of his men, who had come running over the foot-bridge at the stop of the train, and now silently ranged themselves in tacit support. What Cullin had demanded was how Shiner dared tamper with the signals — how, in fact, he had managed to, since they had been carefully locked—and who was he, anyhow. And Shiner had simply answered: "I've a boy shot and dying at Silver Shield. I only heard it late in the night. There's no other way

to get to him. I pay full fare and all damages"—but he got no further, for Toomey came atrot from the engine, threw himself upon him, and grasped his hand.

"What's the trouble, old man?" was the instant question.

And Shiner, turning, saw an old friend and beneficiary, and should have taken heart at the sight. Instead of which, at sound of a sympathetic voice, he who had been firm and fearless in the face of abuse and opposition now wellnigh broke down. "They've killed —little Jack!" he almost sobbed. "Thank God *you're* here, Toomey!"

"Of course you'll take him!" cried Toomey, turning sharp on Cullin.

"Of course I *won't* take him!" snarled Cullin, wrath and temper stiffening his back, "but the law shall, quick as I can fix it. Back to your cab, both of you!" he waved, for Ben, too, was bulkily climbing the platform steps. "Pull out at once and don't you stop for no more snidework!"

"And leave this man here?" shouted Toomey. "Then you can do your own

firing from here on, Cullin. Hold on, Ben, till I get my things off. You can obey if you like, but it's the last run I make with this—faugh! And you say *you've* been a soldier!" It was Toomey's chance, after weeks of pent-up rage for battle, and he couldn't throw it away. Seeing that Ben, dull, heavy, and uncomprehending, was staring stupidly about him, not knowing what to do; seeing that even Cullin was melting at sight of the grief in Shiner's face; seeing the sympathy in the eyes of the bluecoats and the shame in those of the brakemen, Toomey turned loose on his adversary, and Toomey, when fairly started, could talk to the point. It was a tongue-lashing, indeed, and one that left the conductor no chance to reply.

"It's 'gainst orders, and you know it, Toomey," was his futile gasp, when Toomey stopped for breath.

"'Gainst orders you've broken time and again, and you know it! 'Gainst orders Bob Anthony would break your head for not breaking! It's 'gainst orders for you to pull out now when you're blocked, till

you get further orders — and yet you say go."

"How can I get orders without a man or a wire at the station?" burst in Cullin, grasping at straws. "How can I get authority to take this man along? He's liable to arrest anyhow for tampering with the signals."

And then another voice was interjected, another disputant stepped quickly forward, and Toomey checked himself in the first breath of an impassioned outburst; his black hand suddenly shot half-way up to the cap-visor, then came down with a jerk; his heels had clicked together and his knees straightened out, then as suddenly went limp. The newcomer had sprung up the steps. The form was slender and sinewy. Hands, face, and dress were black with soot, but the young voice was deep and the ring of accustomed command was in every word. "That's your cue, Mr. Cullin. Arrest him and fetch him along." Then turning to Toomey: "There's no one at the cab. Better get back, quick!" he added. And Toomey went.

Big Ben gave one look and, without a word,

waddled after his fireman. The tears that stood in old Shiner's eyes dashed away at the brush of a sleeve. A light of astonishment, comprehension, relief suddenly gleamed in their place. The sergeant stared for a moment, looked blankly at his men, then side-stepped for another long gaze at the new-comer's face. Cullin turned sharply, resentful at first at the tone of authority, wrath in his heart and rebuke on his tongue, but then came sudden reminder of Anthony's card—the card the strange young fellow had presented only when needed to convince, the card he had been so sagacious as to retain, the card that proclaimed him a friend of the powers and a person to be considered. Moreover, the friend and person had suggested a means by which actual surrender to the situation might appear as virtual and moral victory. One more look at Shiner and then Shiner settled it. "I submit to arrest, Mr. Cullin. Let me go with you—and settle."

"Get aboard the caboose," was the gruff answer, and, all apparent meekness, Shiner

obeyed. "Not you," added Cullin, as Shiner's saddle-bag-bearing friend would have followed. "Give me the bags," said Shiner, "and you look to—" A significant glance at the signal told the rest. Cullin followed it with his eyes, saw the arm still lowered to the "stop," knew that it should not be left there, and for a moment held back.

"*He*'ll fix it," said Shiner, from the platform of the caboose, while his eyes sought the face of the tall young fellow at Cullin's back. Cullin strode to the corner of the office and followed the ranchman with curious eyes. That sun-tanned, bow-legged person straddled down the back steps, his big spurs jingling, a high boot-heel catching on next to the lowermost and pitching him forward. He clamped his broadbrim on his head with one hand and steadied his holster with the other, straightened up with half-stifled expletive, and the next minute was swarming up the slender iron rungs of the signal-ladder. "He's got to prop it up where it belongs," said the sergeant. "Reckon he must have shot the wire that held it." And

of a truth the wire was severed. But when Cullin turned back to his train with the mystery cleared, the sight and sound of new commotion blocked his own signal to start.

Two horsemen, on foam-spattered broncos, were spurring vehemently down the road from the eastward ridge. Two others were trailing exhaustedly two hundred lengths behind, only just feebly popping over the divide. And to these persons both his prisoner and his prisoner's advocate, who were clasping hands as he whirled and saw them, were now signalling cheer and encouragement. Ten cars ahead, at the cab, Big Ben and Toomey, too, were leaning far out and eagerly watching the chase; the sergeant and his men, wondering much at the sight, but professionally impassive, strode to the end of the platform for better view, then all of a sudden began to shout and swing their caps, and before Cullin could recover from his surprise the foremost rider, tall, spare, with long, grizzled mustache and fiery eyes, threw himself from saddle and came bounding up the steps. He was sur-

rounded in an instant, only one man hanging back. The slender young fellow in the grimy cap and overalls quietly stepped into the dark interior of the caboose.

In the glare of the unclouded sunshine, breathing hard from his exertion, his hand grasped successively by Shiner and the three soldiers, the veteran trooper told his hurried tale, while, one after another, his followers, wellnigh exhausted, labored after him, and finally rolled stiffly to *terra firma* at the station, their wretched livery mounts, with dripping, quivering flanks and drooping heads, stood straddling close at hand, too utterly used up to stagger away.

Nolan's story was brief but explicit. Somebody in the swarm that overwhelmed the Narrow Gauge train the previous night had crept back to town after midnight and started the story that young Breifogle had been slugged by the gang. By early morning it got to the father's ears. With the sheriff and some friends he had driven down in the wake of No. 4, found plenty of men who could tell of the mobbing, but none who

could tell of his son. The miners had scattered; the few passengers also, glad that they were not "wanted" by that infuriated crowd. It was then after sunrise, and, almost crazed by anxiety and wrath, Breifogle had hurried back to Argenta. His first thought seemed to be vengeance on Nolan, whom rumor declared the ringleader of his son's assailants, and a warrant was out for his arrest, even as the big Mogul was rolling into the yard, with its dingy-brown train of freight-cars and the battered body of that luckless youth, Nolan's assailant at Silver Shield.

The first full peril of his situation broke upon Nolan the instant the news was rushed to him. Innocent of any part in the assault though he was—ignorant of it, in fact, until dawn—he well knew that every artifice would be played against him, and that all the power, the means, and methods of the Breifogle clique would be lavishly used. Long imprisonment would be sure, harsh trial certain, acquittal improbable, hanging almost a certainty.

"Away with you! Get back to the mines

and the mountains!" was the instant warning, and without the loss of a minute, mounted on such horses as his friends could hire, he and three of his trustiest followers had galloped away. They thought the sheriff was at their heels when the Fast Freight came thundering after them, but hailed, with amaze and joy, the signal from the tender, and, feeling sure the train would await them here, had spurred on to the station.

"You'll send the horses back for us, will you, sergeant?" he finished. Then eagerly, "Now, conductor, shall we pull out for Summit?"

"Pull out for nothing," was the astounding answer. "You know perfectly no Time Freight on this road takes a passenger of any kind, and it would be more'n my job's worth to take you!"

"Then, in God's name, why did you signal?" was the almost agonized question.

"Signal be jiggered! I never signalled. No man of *my* crew signalled. If you want to get back to the mines, stay here and flag No. 5. She'll be along at eleven."

"Along at *eleven!* Man alive, the sheriff will be here with a posse of forty long before that!"

"*Long* before that!" almost screamed old Shiner. "Look, there, what you see! He's coming now!"

And then Geordie Graham, listening with beating heart within the open doorway of the caboose, could stand the strain no longer. The man he must see, the man on whom everything depended, the old friend whom he most trusted and believed in stood in sore peril. The cause for which he had come all these miles must fail so sure as Nolan slipped into the power of the adversary, even though grasped by the hand of the law. It was no time for ethics—no time for casuists. He let his voice out in the old tone of authority:

"You've no time to lose, Mr. Cullin. Arrest them, too, and come on!"

With wonderment in his eyes, with Shiner whispering caution in his ear, "Long" Nolan was hustled aboard the caboose just as the wheels began to turn, his breathless followers

clambering after, while afar up the divide toward the east, by twos and threes, in eager pursuit, egged on by lavish promise of reward, the sheriff of Yampah, with a score of his men, spurred furiously on the trail of a train that, starting slowly and heavily, speedily gained headway and soon went thundering up the grade, "leaving the wolves behind."

CHAPTER X

FIRST SHOTS OF THE SUMMER

HALF-WAY up the scarred slope of mountain-side, and opposite the mouth of a deep ravine, hung the crude wooden buildings and costly machinery of a modern mine. Zigzagging up the heights, the road that led to it from the ramshackle town in the valley was dotted with groups of rough-coated men, all plodding steadily onward. Perched on "benches" and shelves and dumps of blasted rock and fresh-heaped earth, similar though smaller clusters of buildings dotted the lower slopes, marring the grand outlines and sweeping curves of the great upheavals, cutting ugly gashes in the green and swelling billows, yet eagerly sought in the race for wealth and the greed for gold, because of the treasures they wrested from the bowels of the everlasting hills. Afar down the

SILVER SHIELD

winding valley a turbid stream went frothing away to the foot-hills, telling of labor, turmoil, and strife. Beside it twisted and turned the railway that burrowed through the range barely five miles back of the town, and reappeared on the westward face of the Silver Bow, clinging dizzily to heights that looked down on rolling miles of pine, cedar, stunted oak, and almost primeval loneliness. The mineral wealth, said the experts, lay on the eastward side, and by thousands the miners were there, swarming like ants all over the surface seeking their golden gain.

And something was surely amiss at the mines when the chimneys of as many as six of the "plants" gave forth no smoke, when the fires were out and the men adrift. Something had happened that called the craftsmen from a dozen other burrows to the aid of those at the new and lately thronging works, on that shoulder at the mouth of the gorge—the mine of the Silver Shield. Murder most foul, said the story, had been done in the name of the law. Armed guards of the property had shot down, it was said, a half-

score of workmen, clamoring only for their pay and their rights. A son of the principal owner, so it was known, had ordered his men to fire. A son of an old soldier and settler, living in peace barely forty miles away, was one of the victims, for he had taken sides with Long Nolan, who without rhyme or reason had been discharged, and violently flung from the premises. There had been a wild rush on the guard, a volley, a recoil, a rally in force, and an outcry for vengeance. Then the guard had to shoot in earnest and self-defence, for their lives were at stake. Some of the men had gone to Argenta to plead with the owners, but most had remained to stir all hands within ten miles to the support of their fellows. The miscreant who had ordered "fire" had escaped across to Miners' Joy, only to be dealt with by sympathizers on the Narrow Gauge; but the men who fired and who shot to kill were trapped like rats in a hole. Surrounded on every side, every avenue of escape now guarded, they and the luckless manager of the mine were cooped in their log fortification,

with two lives and several serious wounds to answer for, and as the sun went westering this long summer's day they had two hours left in which to decide—come out and surrender or be burned out where they lay.

Half the village had gone to swell the ranks of the rioters; another half—slatternly women and unkempt children—swarmed in the single street and gazed upward at the heights. Every ledge about the threatened buildings was black with men, men furious with hate and mad with liquor, men needing only determined and resolute leaders to go in and finish their fearful work.

But here was their lack. The men they had counted on, one man in particular on whose account many of their number had braved the guard and threatened the owners —one man, Long Nolan himself, refused point blank to have aught to do with them or their plans. Another man, he whose son lay dying in the village, shot down by the guards, was there, sad-eyed yet stern-faced, to stay and dissuade them. The one train up from the East that day—the only one

that could come, for now the road was blown out in a dozen places down the gorge—had brought with it Nolan and Shiner, with two or three friends at their back, and Nolan and Shiner, in spite of their wrongs, were pleading hard for peace, pleading so hard, so earnestly, that by 5 P.M. many a man, American born, had seen the force of their reasoning and had stepped back from the front.

But among the killed was a poor lad from the mountains of Bohemia. Among the vengeful throng were swarms of foreigners who could understand little or nothing of what Nolan and his friends were saying, and who speedily would have scorned it could they have understood, for at five o'clock another speaker took the stand, a man of the people he called himself, a foreigner long on our shores, yet fluent in the language of the Slavs, and in ten minutes the torrent was turned. With terror in his eyes, a man who had long worked with Nolan, a foreigner, too, came running to the silent, anxious little group of Anglo-Saxons. "Nolan—Nolan,"

he cried. "He says you was traitor! He says you was gone to Argenta and told all their secrets, and you was bought off—bribed —and you bring strangers to help you! He says you and they are just spies, an' now they come for *you!*"

One glance from where the little group were crouching, sheltered from possible shots from the buildings, yet between them and the throng, told Nolan and Shiner the alarm was real, the words were true. Like so many maddened beasts, a gang of uncouth, unkempt, blood-thirsty beings were now crowding up the narrow roadway from the bench below.

"My God, Mr. Geordie!" cried Nolan, in sudden agony of spirit, "I never once dreamed of this!"

It was, indeed, a moment of terror. Here, barely a dozen in all, were Nolan, Shiner, George Graham, and a few of the more intelligent, the Americans, among the miners. There, possibly a hundred yards away, and to the number of at least three hundred, a throng of human brutes, utterly ignorant,

superstitious, credulous, craftily inspired, were now surging slowly forward up the heights. Two minutes would bring them about the little party in overwhelming strength. Flight anywhere downhill was impossible. The one refuge in sight was that beleagured little clump of buildings just beyond them up the slope, garrisoned by a dozen desperate men who had shouted warning again and again, they'd shoot down the first man that showed a head above the rocks.

But desperate straits need desperate measures. All on a sudden a tall, slender youth, in the coarse dress of a railway fireman, sprang from the midst of the pallid-faced group and, waving his handkerchief over his head, called back, "Stay where you are one minute!" and then, without a second's falter or swerve, straight for the nearest building, a low, one-story log-house, the manager's office near the mouth of the mine, waving his white signal high as his arm could reach, and shouting, "Don't fire—we are friends!" George Graham swiftly climbed for the upper level. One rifle flashed. One

bullet whizzed over his head, but he reached the road, then, both arms extended, rushed straight for the door.

It was thrown open to admit him by Cawker, the manager, white-faced almost as they whom Geordie had left. "Come out here!" cried Graham. "See for yourself. Nolan, Shiner, with those few lads, are all that have stood between you and the mob below. Every American is out of it. They're coming to kill Nolan for turning against them. Call him up! Call them all— There's barely a dozen. Then you've got just as many more to stand by you!"

And Cawker had sense to see and to realize. "Call 'em yourself," said he. "Don't shoot, men! These are friends come to aid us!" he cried, running up and down in front of the loop-holes. "Come on, Nolan and all of you," he added, for Graham had gone bounding half-way back again, and, like so many goats, the threatened party came scrambling out of their shelter and up the steep incline, while afar down the hill-side rose a yell of baffled rage and vengeance.

"Hold the rest of them whatever you do!" shouted Geordie, again racing back. "Don't let that gang over the edge or you're gone!" And again the brown barrels of the rifles thrust forth from the wooden walls and were turned on the bend of the road. Almost breathless, Long Nolan, and with him the little squad of adherents, came running up to the door. "Inside, quick as you can!" shouted Cawker. "We've got to give those blood-hounds a lesson."

Even as he spoke a shot struck the thick, iron hinge of the heavy door, the lead spattering viciously. Another ripped through the casement of the nearest window, and a shiver of glass was heard within, as the bullet spun through the shade of a lamp swinging from the beam above. Cawker ducked, unaccustomed to such sounds, and dove to the interior. Old Nolan, soldier of the Civil War and veteran of many an Indian skirmish, disdained to notice it. Geordie, bemoaning the luck that had left his pet rifle in Denver, busied himself with Nolan in "herding" the party within before him-

self following. Then Shiner was found missing.

"He started with us," cried Nolan. "He wanted to go back to be with his boy, but we showed him he'd never get through. Those brutes would head him off and kick his life out. He must have— Good God, Mr. Geordie! Look where he lies!"

And then they saw that the old plainsman, in his eagerness to make a way back to his possibly dying son, had quit the rush when half-way up, had turned eastward and sought a foot-path down the mountain-side, had found it guarded, like the rest, by a gang that yelled savage welcome at sight of him. Then, too late, he had turned again, had managed to run some fifty yards along the jagged slope, when a shot from a well-aimed rifle laid him low. With a leg broken just above the knee, poor Shiner went down, and without so much as a word, with only one glance into each other's eyes, Long Nolan and Geordie swooped down to the rescue.

Breasting the hill fifty yards below him came the heaving throng of rioters, few of

them, luckily, with fire-arms, but all bent on vengeance. Darting downhill to Shiner came the old and the new of the regiment he had known for years and swore by to the end—Nolan, its oldest sergeant when discharged; Graham, its youngest subaltern when so recently commissioned. But, old and new, they were one in purpose and in spirit. The trained muscles, the lithe young limbs of the new bore him bounding down the slope in half the time it took the elder. Shiner lay facing the coming throng, grim hate in his eyes and revolver in hand. In the fury of yells that arose he never heard the shout of encouragement from above. Geordie was bending over him, had seized him by the arm, was slinging him on his broad young back before ever Shiner saw the face of his rescuer, and Geordie, with his helpless burden, was stumbling up the height again before Nolan could join and aid him.

By that time the peering guardians of the office had caught sight of the cause of the pandemonium of howls and curses from below, and the onward rush was stayed by

the sound of shots from the hill and bullets whistling overhead. Yet only for a moment. Bullets sent downhill almost always fly high, and finding this to be so the mob took courage and came on again, those who had guns or revolvers shooting frantically up the slope, splintering rocks and spattering dirt as they bit at the heels of the rescuers. It was a desperate, do or die, neck or nothing, bit of daring and devotion—Nolan's third and Geordie's first experience in just such a feat. But the blood of the Graemes was up, and the younger soldier was not to be outdone by the old. The guards at the office burst into a cheer as the two came staggering up to the level, with poor Shiner groaning between them, and then quick work and hot was needed, for the mob came fierce on their trail.

"There's more Winchesters there in the gun-rack," shouted Cawker, as Shiner was laid on a bunk in a back room. "They'll be all round us here in a minute."

"Aim low and pick out the leaders, d'ye hear?" panted Nolan. "Don't let 'em get

within reach of the buildings, whatever you do. They'll burn 'em over our heads. Let me have your loop-hole, *you!*" he ordered a young fellow, whose lips were blue with excitement and dread. "Go sit by Shiner and give him water till I spoil a few of these voters." And the presence of the veteran, the confident ring of his voice, seemed to lend instant courage to the defence.

And courage, cool courage and grit, were needed, for the situation was difficult, if not, indeed, desperate. With any skilled leader to direct the mob, the refuge sought by the defence would already have been ruined. The office building, made of hewn logs laid horizontally and with possible view of defence, had been placed at the brow of the slope on one side and near the mouth of the mine on the other. Later, however, rude structures of unplaned pine sprung up—compressor-plant, blacksmith-shop, and the like—about it, no one of them strong enough to serve as a fort, and all of them a menace now because they screened the approaches on two sides and could be fired in a dozen places.

And now that Graham and Nolan were here to aid, this defect was noticed at once.

"This won't do at all, Mr. Cawker," said Graham, as he sprung the lever of a new Winchester and glanced into the chamber. "We'll be surrounded and burned out of here in ten minutes. We've got to occupy those others, too."

Cawker stared at the "young feller" with angering eyes. A moment agone and he was praising his daring, but that astonishing tone of authority nettled him. What business had a railway fireman telling him, a mine manager, what to do in case of a row?

"*You* get to a loop-hole and 'tend to that," snapped he. "I'll 'tend to my business," and he turned to Long Nolan, just heaving up from a peep-hole, for support and approval. Nolan he knew for a soldier of old. He had learned to respect him quite as much as he jealously feared, and Nolan's answer took him utterly aback:

"You do as he tells you and do it quick. He knows his business better'n ever you'll begin to know yours."

CHAPTER XI

A NIGHT ON GUARD

TWO minutes more, with eight men to back him, George Graham was knocking or sawing out holes in the blacksmith-shop, and presently a man with a reliable Winchester was crouched by each opening watching the next move of the foe. The shop was perched at the edge of a flat-topped "dump," commanding the rocky slopes to the roadway on one side, the hill on the other. It was exposed to shots from below, yet the hardest to reach by direct assault. In the larger building a bit farther back, the compressor-house, Cawker and four others were stationed, guarding the approach from the north. The manager had taken Nolan's broad hint, and the subsequent orders, with one long look of amaze, then with the light of comprehension in his eyes

and the silence of consent on his lips. Did he not know that the main charge against Nolan had been loyalty to his old comrades rather than his new employers? Did he not know, or at least more than suspect, that the company was trying to "freeze out" the distant holders? Did he not know, down in his heart, that it was out and out robbery? And now, in spite of youth and disguise, the manager saw in this masterful stranger one of the very elements the owners had sought to keep at a distance and in ignorance of true conditions. So far from resenting, he now thanked God for his coming. What else could explain Nolan's deference—Nolan, the most independent and self-respecting man at the mines? What else could it mean but that this youth was one of his officers—men skilled and schooled in warfare if not in mining—men taught to face danger with stout heart and stubborn front? All in the space of a few seconds the truth had flashed upon Cawker. It might not be just what the owners would want, thought he, but it's almighty good for us all.

Nolan, with a handful of men, still clung to the stoutest of the buildings. It stood without the entrance to the ravine in which had been discovered the outcropping that started the fame of Silver Shield. In this, also, stood two other buildings, but these were so far from the outer shop that flames need not be feared. Nolan was to care for the wounded and guard the outward approach, and all three were in close support of each other. Whoever managed to rush that little group of buildings would know, if he lived, that he had been through a fight.

And now it was after six of the long summer day. The rioters had received a wholesome lesson in the volley that met their first attempt to swarm up from the south. They had gone tumbling and cursing back to shelter, with three men wounded and many of the others badly scared, and now were being harangued by their vociferous leader, and hundreds had come to hear. Graham turned to the young Slav who had borne the first news to Nolan. "Creep out there as far as you can," he ordered, "listen to what

is said, and tell me. They cannot reach you." But the frightened lad crouched and whimpered. He *dared* not.

"Come on, then," answered Geordie, grasping the stout collar of the hickory shirt, and come he had to, moaning and imploring. With revolver in his right hand, his unwilling interpreter in the left, Geordie scrambled down to the roadway, and then, coming in view of the gang, crouched with his prisoner behind sheltering bowlders, regardless of the shots which began to hiss from below. The speaker was still shouting; his words were easily heard. Yells of approval and savage delight punctuated every other sentence. "What was that?" demanded Geordie, as the applause became furious.

"He say they make circle—all sides, uphill, sidehill, downhill. They all together run in when he give the word."

"He fights like a Cheyenne," grinned the young commander. "How soon do they begin?"

"Right off; now! They come from *all* round!" was the almost agonized cry.

"Then I won't have to lug you back. You can go!"

And like a frightened hare the young foreigner darted away, dodging and diving up the slope, only to fall exhausted at the top, and then to creep on all-fours to the shelter of the office. Already some of the armed rioters had managed to climb far up the hill-side and from behind rock or ledge to open fire on the platform. The range was full three hundred yards, their aim was poor, and the bullets flew wild, but the effect on this poor lad was all they could ask. He collapsed at the opening door.

Leisurely, yet cautiously, Geordie climbed in his tracks—went first to the office to give warning to Nolan, then round to the compressor to instruct the little guard. Cawker poked a head from a window and looked anxiously toward the gaping mouth of the ravine. The darkness of night was already settling in its gloomy depths. The homely shed looked black and forbidding. Aloft on each side were precipitous slopes affording but slight foothold. Little likelihood was

there of rioters sliding down to attack them, but, suppose they pried loose, or blasted out, some of those huge rocks up the mountain and sent them rolling, bounding, crashing down? What might *then* happen?

A bullet tearing through the shingling, ten feet above Cawker's protruding head, made him jerk it in, like a turtle, but presently it reappeared at the window.

"It's the dynamite I'm thinking of," said he. "A rock lighting on that now—"

"Where is it?" interrupted Graham.

"In that first shed yonder—a dozen boxes."

"Bring two men and come along," was the quick order, and it was no time now for reluctance, resentment, much less refusal. The two men summoned shrank back and would not come, but Cawker found two who dared to follow. It was a case of "duck and run" for all.

"Watch the hill-side above!" shouted Graham, in tones that rang through every building and reached every ear. "Shoot down every man that tries to heave rocks

into the ravine, or fire at us. We're going to move that dynamite."

Once within the shelter of the gorge, with comrades carefully sighting the slopes, Geordie felt the danger would not be very great. A swift rush carried all four over the open space of twenty yards. Three or four shots came zipping from aloft, but the instant ring of Winchesters back of them told that watchful eyes had noted every head that appeared, and the swift crackle of fire from the shop put instant stop to the fun up the slope. Into the store-room the manager led them, and unlocked a heavy little trap-door within; then, one by one, the ominous-looking cases were dragged forth, hoisted, and swiftly borne to the mouth of the mine. Three tunnels there seemed to be, as Geordie hurriedly noted, but into the largest and lowermost they shouldered their perilous burden and carefully, cautiously, stacked the boxes well inside; went back, and searched out, and followed with all the fuse and powder stored at the top. Then, with rock and ore and barrels of earth, they built a

stout barrier in front of the tunnel, blocking it from without, and the sun was down and night was upon them when they stumbled back to their posts.

For now still a weightier problem remained to them—how to defend those works in the dark.

In all, Geordie Graham found they had just twenty men on whom he could count. The trembling young Slav at the blacksmith-shop, the blue-lipped boy in the office, and sorely wounded old Shiner were out of the fight. But Cawker's mine-guards were native born, or Irish, and most of the reinforcements that came with Nolan and himself were Americans, and all were good men and true. By day they could see and shoot at any man or men who sought to approach them with hostile intent. By night they could see nothing. There was only one way, said Graham, to prevent the more daring among the rioters crawling in on them and firing some of the shops, and that was to throw out strong pickets on every side, then trust to their ears, their grit, and their guns.

Already he had been selecting good positions in which to post his sentries. Ten at least, full half his force, would be needed, and while vigilant watch was kept through the twilight, and a warning shot sent at every hat that showed within dangerous range, Geordie went from building to building picking out his men.

Arms, ammunition, and provisions, fortunately, they had in abundance. The company had long since seen to that. Nolan already had set "Blue Lips" to work building a fire in the big kitchen stove at the office and setting the kettle to boil. Coffee, hard bread, and bacon, with canned pork and beans, were served to all hands, about five at a time, and then, with Nolan to station the watchers on the south and west fronts, George and his five stole out on the northward slope, alert, cautious, and silent, moving only a few paces at a time.

Afar down in the depths of the valley the clustered lights of the excited town shone brilliantly through the gloaming. Every now and then through the surrounding silence

came the bark of dogs, the shrill voices of clamoring women, and occasionally a burst of howls and yells. Some rude orator was still preaching death and destruction to a more than half-drunken gang, urging them on to the aid of their brethren up the levels above. All about the Silver Shield, however, was ominously still. Over on opposite heights and down in stray gulches could be seen the flitting lights of rival establishments, and away to the west, around the base of the mountain where the railway squirmed by the side of the tortuous stream, two or three locomotive-engines, on stalled trains, had been whistling long and hard for aid. All that was useless. Above for a mile, below for a league, the track had been torn up in places, and down along Silver Run, toward Hatch's Cove and the foot-hills, culverts and cuts had been mined and blown out for five miles more. No sheriff's posses from below, no hated Pinkertons, no despised militia, no dreaded regulars, should come to the aid of Silver Shield till there was nothing left worth saving.

And up here on the northward flank of the bold, rounded heights that overhung the town, and harbored now both besieged and besiegers, invisible to each other and to the lower world in the darkness, Geordie Graham lay crouching behind a little bowlder, every sense on edge, for to his left front, a little higher up, he could distinctly hear low, gruff voices, confused murmurings and movements, sounds that told him that, relying on their overwhelming numbers, the mob was coming slowly, surely, down to carry out their threat to fire the buildings and to finish as they pleased the wretched defenders.

It was barely nine o'clock. Below him, perhaps twenty yards downhill, was his nearest sentry. Above him, and a little retired, was another, a silent young German-American who had been at the head of the men working tunnel Number Two. Beyond him still, and thrown back toward the head of the ravine, was one of Cawker's guard, a sharp-eyed, sharp-witted chap who had seemed at first to chafe at Graham's hints and orders, yet had acted on them. And

on these two, so far as sound could enable him to judge, all ignorant of their presence and purpose, this uncouth mass of men was bearing down. Winchester in hand and, as he himself said later, his heart in his mouth, Geordie stole swiftly uphill to the post of the German and found him kneeling and all aquiver with excitement. He, too, had just heard.

"Don't fire till I do," said Graham. "I'll be right out where you can hear me challenge." A few steps higher he climbed, and then called low and clear:

"D'you hear them coming, guard? Can you see anything?"

And the answer came in the drawl of the Southland:

"Hyuh 'em plain 'nuff, but they don't show a light yet. Reckon they don't mean tuh."

"We'll give them the fill of our magazines if they don't halt at the word. Wait till I let drive, then let them have it!"

And so, crouching low, straightforward along the slope he sped, till, perhaps twenty

yards out, the black bulk of the mountain-side loomed between him and the westward heaven, while against the stars of the northern horizon he could dimly determine, heaving steadily toward him, not fifty paces away, some huge, murmuring, moving mass. And then there rang out on the silence of the night, clear, stern, and commanding, a voice the like of which their ears had never heard, in words that even they could not fail to comprehend:

"Halt where you are—or we fire!"

There was an instant of recoil and confusion and fear. Then furious tones from far back in the throng and guttural shoutings that seemed urging them on, for, presently, on they came, but in the silence and dread of death.

Back went the lever of Graham's Winchester; slap went the bolt to its seat, with the shining cartridge ahead of it; up came the butt to the shoulder; and then, once more, that deep, virile voice rang along the heights and went echoing away across the gorge. Back at the mine Nolan's heart leaped at the

sound of it. Away down in the village they heard it and shrank, for the next instant set them all shrieking; for the lightning flashed and the rifles barked loud and swift, and strong men howled and turned and fled, anywhere out of the way, and some fell headlong, screaming and cursing, in the rush and panic that spread from one stern and sudden word—the soldier command: "Fire!"

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN OF THE SIEGE

DOWN in the valley that night there was commotion and uproar for hours, but there was quiet at Silver Shield. One after another furious speeches were made in foreign tongues, speeches in which the murderous occupants of the mine buildings were doomed to an eternity of torment, and the would-be murderous element among the miners was lauded to the skies and urged to further effort.

But the astonishing repulse, the fact that they had been met in the open as well as in the dark, and that a swift and sudden fire had been poured into their very midst, had shattered the nerve of men already shaken, although it later turned out that only three of their number had really been shot (two of them in the back), and that twoscore had

been trampled and torn by their own people, while some thirty or more were missing, "left dead on the hill," said their fellows, in the mad rush for safety that followed the first flash. That sharp, stern order and the instant response had started the rumor that soldiers, regulars, had come up from the fort. It was pointed out that while the Transcontinental was blocked down the Run, no one had thought to cripple the Narrow Gauge over in the valley beyond. The road was open to Miners' Joy, the road by which young Breifogle had made his escape, and by this roundabout route had succor reached the besieged garrison.

All that liquor and eloquence could do was tried on the raging townsmen that night, but not until broad daylight could they be induced to make another trial, and by that time few were able to keep their feet on the level.

Less than half a dozen shots from each of five Winchesters had been enough, combined with darkness, to utterly rout the mass of rioters. Mindful of the lesson well learned at the Point—to instantly follow a staggering

blow—Graham had sprung from his cover, called to his fellows to "come on," and so, shouting and shooting at the very heels of the panic, had not only chased them in headlong flight, but, returning, had picked up half a dozen terrified prisoners and herded them back to Nolan for such reassurance and comfort as that grim old trooper saw fit to administer. When morning broke the depths of the valley were still shrouded in mist and gloom. Up on the heights the brilliant hues of the dawn shone far and wide on rocky peak and pinnacle and, above the wooden tower of the office building, on the fluttering folds of an American flag.

That was a grewsome day on Lance Creek. Four of the mines, temporarily bereft of hands, had fired up and gone to work with such force as they had, and declined to take back the men who had quit. The managers, superintendents, bosses, and owners held council together and started out with what they termed a relief expedition to rescue the garrison of Silver Shield. They were seen as they came solemnly marching uphill, waving

a white flag by way of assurance, and were met on the roadway by Nolan and Geordie. Cawker was taking a much-needed nap.

"Are you all safe?" was the eager question from below.

"Safe from what?" asked Nolan, from above.

"Why, the mob, the rioters. Didn't they try to clean you out last night?"

"Did they?" asked Nolan turning to his silent young friend the fireman. "Was that what those fellows were thinking of that you chased off the hill? Why, maybe it was! But here, what we came down to find out was about Shiner's boy. How's he?"

Then the rescuers looked at one another in some bewilderment. The leaders were friends of Cawker. They hardly knew Nolan. They did not know his companion the fireman.

"D'you mean to tell us you've had no trouble up there?" was the eager demand.

"Why, lots of it, four days ago—'t least *I* had," answered Nolan, grimly, "but nothin' worth mention last night."

"Why, man," cried the manager of the White Eagle, "there were a thousand riotous Bohemians and Dagoes, and Lord knows what all, went up there last night to burn those buildings over your heads and you with 'em."

"Why, cert'nly," said Nolan, with preternatural gravity and a wink at his comrade, who was doing his utmost to keep a straight face. "It must have been some of those fellows *you* blew in about ten o'clock. But say," he broke off, as though this matter bored him, "what we want to know is about Shiner's boy. They didn't seem to have time to talk."

By which time it dawned upon the officials present that Nolan was having fun with them, and though the spokesmen were nettled, many others, with genuine American sense of humor, felt that he couldn't be blamed.

"Your name is Nolan, I think," said a man from the Denver. "We've heard of you. Shiner's boy is better, though still weak. You mustn't feel we left you to shift for your-

selves up there. Our men were all out, and we didn't know how soon they'd be swooping on us. 'Twasn't until last night it was generally known that you were back, and that you and your friends were what saved Cawker and the Silver Shield yesterday. How's *he?*"

"Cawker? Oh, Cawker's probably about got dinner ready for you gentlemen by this time. If you are sure about Shiner we won't go down."

"Go down? Why, Nolan, they'd murder you!"

But there came a sudden shot, and then a shout, from somewhere uphill. On the edge of the dump a man was eagerly waving his hat, pointing away to the northeast along the massive slope of the mountain.

"Well, Mr. Fireman," said Nolan, "I guess we'll have to go back. But you are sure about Shiner, are you?"—this again to the visitors, as he persisted in calling them. "Well, come right along up and see the old man himself. Dinner ought to be ready now."

But, once back at the buildings, Nolan left

to Cawker and his guard the pleasure of receiving the crowd from across the creek. He and Geordie were needed at once at the lookout on top of the office, the little tower above which fluttered the flag. Down on the platform anxious faces were upturned, for the sentry had seen a countless throng of men, so he said, coming over from Miners' Joy. To Cawker and his fellows it meant but one thing: The miners in the northward valley, more numerous than these along Lance Creek, reinforced, probably, by a swarm of the idlers from Hatch's Cove, were coming to the aid of their friends and fellow-countrymen in the strike at Silver Shield.

For two miles out the road from the village meandered up a winding ravine, then went twisting and turning along the eastward face of the mountain until it dipped out of sight over the massive divide. Down in the depths of the gorge little dots of men could be seen hurrying away up the trail as though going to meet the coming concourse. Away out along the mountain-side not to exceed three or four vehicles and a scant dozen of horse-

men could dimly be made out, crawling slowly southward, coming gingerly towards them. Where, then, was the "countless throng"?

"They were in sight on yonder ridge," said the lookout, "not ten minutes ago. They must be hiding in the hollows, waiting for the others to catch up," whereupon Nolan, looking daggers, had called him a scarehead, and Geordie shouted for Cawker's glass. It was sent up the stairway in less than a minute and focussed on Porphyry Point, a massive buttress overhanging the farther valley. For long seconds Geordie steadied the binocular against the staff and peered silently through. At last he said: "Some riders and two or three livery-rigs are coming, but I see no men afoot." Then, turning over his shoulder to Cawker, standing in the midst of his friends and fellow-managers, and looking eagerly aloft, he called: "Better have dinner now, if it's ready. It will take 'em an hour to get here."

"Who is that young fellow, anyhow?" asked Townsend, of the Vanguard Mine, and

the ears of a score of men awaited the answer.

"That young feller," said Cawker, in low tone, and impressively, "was a stranger to every one here, except old Nolan and Shiner, just twenty-four hours ago. Now there ain't one of 'em but swears by him. I don't know him from Adam, and Nolan won't tell, but, gentlemen—that young feller's a dandy!"

And this of a youth in grimy cap, flannels, and overalls, with a pair of smouched soldier gauntlets hiding the white of his hands, and a coating of coal-dust and smudge hiding all but the clear, healthy white of his eyes!

But an hour later came at least partial enlightenment. Picking their way, afoot and a few in saddle, welcomed by shouts from the lately besieged, and escorted by a deputation sent forward to meet them, there began to arrive certain citizens well known to the neighborhood by name and reputation.

There was the sheriff of Yampah, with a small squad of deputies. There was the mayor of Argenta, a director in the mines, and with him, puffing prodigiously and slowly

up the ramp from the wagon-road, two brother directors away out from Denver. There were certain prominent citizens of Argenta and Hatch's Cove. There were certain railway men, with men and tools at their back and no time to waste. There were two men in civilian dress whom many a man of Silver Run knew for soldiers at once, for as such had they known them before—Captain Lee and Quartermaster McCrea of the old —th Cavalry—and there had been a remarkable meeting and hand-shaking between them and Nolan, and a whispered confabulation, at the end of which the two dove into the office building where Shiner still lay, comforted by better news of his boy, by good surgical aid, and by a skilful and competent nurse who, for more than one reason, preferred to keep out of sight for the time being. There had been a face-to-face meeting between sergeant and sheriff when Nolan came forth from a rapturous scene at old Shiner's bedside. But this time the sheriff looked sheepish, and there was no talk of arrest. Young Breifogle, it seems, would not die of

his wounds. One of the culprits had "split" and the real assailants were known.

And there had been a fine shower of congratulation on Cawker for his heroic defence and determined stand against tremendous odds, and the three magnates present of Silver Shield had begun with much unction to talk of reward and appreciation, and very probably Cawker felt both heroic and deserving, and quite ready to accept all credit and pay, but there were too many witnesses, too many wise men, too many suggestive smiles and snickers and audible remarks, and Cawker had sense to see and then to rise manfully to the occasion.

"We did the best we knew how, gentlemen," said he, "but I am bound to say Silver Shield would have been in ruins this minute, and most of us dead, if it hadn't been for Nolan—the man you ordered thrown out."

There was a silence almost dramatic for a moment.

"Who ordered him thrown out?" asked Mr. Stoner, of Denver.

"The directors, sir, unless young Mr. Breifogle lied. These men are my witnesses."

And the answer came straightway.

"No such orders were given by the board. If Mr. Breifogle gave them, they were his alone."

Whereupon a shout went up that shook the roof. But the end was not yet. Nolan was dragged forward to be grasped by the hand and smothered with congratulations, and old Nolan, in turn, would have none of it. A dozen men had seized Geordie Graham, even as his classmates and comrades had chaired him a few weeks back at the Point, and black, grimy, and protesting, he was heaved forward and deposited in front of the astonished trio. But the shout that went up from all sides was significant. Lee and McCrea were shouting, too.

"More heroes?" asked Mr. Stoner, wide-eyed and uncomprehending. "Well — er, Nolan, they told us on the way over that there must be a hundred soldiers here."

"That's about right, sir," grinned Nolan; then, reaching forth, he laid a hand lightly on Graham's broad shoulder, "and here stands —most of 'em."

CHAPTER XIII

AWAY ON THE WARPATH

AND all these chapters it has taken to tell how it came about that Second Lieutenant George Montrose Graham was quite a celebrity in the —th Cavalry before ever he reported for duty with his troop. Several weeks the Silver Shield Mining Company spent in a squabble among themselves that ended in the smothering of "the Breifogle interest," and came near to sending "the Boss of Argenta" to jail. Several days elapsed before Captain Lee and Lieutenants McCrea and Graham felt it entirely prudent to leave, but when they did it was with the assurance that stockholders who had endured to the end, as had Graham, Lee, and McCrea, were now to reap the reward of their tenacity.

It is a recorded fact that, within three

weeks after the departure of McCrea and Geordie from West Point for the West, there came an offer to Dr. Graham of something like six times the cost price of his shares, and the offer was declined, with thanks.

It is a recorded fact that Silver Shield was reorganized within the summer, to the end that the controlling interest passed from Colorado to Chicago.

It is a recorded fact that, from afar out in the Rockies, there came to Lieutenant Colonel Hazzard, Commandant of Cadets, a "wire" that puzzled him not a little until he laid it before his clear-headed wife, who gave him a delighted kiss and scurried away to show it to Mrs. Graham. It read:

"You win. I lose; and, losing, am a heavy winner."

For Bonner had supplied the money that paid for much of that costly plant, most of which would have gone up in smoke and down in ruin could the mob have had its way. Bonner himself had rushed out to Denver at news of the trouble. Bonner sent for Cawker and Nolan, and others of the em-

ployés, and learned for himself how things had been going, and was not too civil to Stoner and his Denver colleagues. Bonner, a director in the Transcontinental, heard from Anthony and Cullin all about the young fireman they spirited up to the mines, and the elder Breifogle had to hear how that young fireman cared for the battered son and heir, after his "beating up" at the fists and feet of the rioters, and if Breifogle bore no love for the Grahams, he at least loved his own.

It is a recorded fact that old Shiner got well of his wound after many long weeks, and his brave boy in much shorter time, and that both were handsomely rewarded. Cawker came in for a good thing by way of a raise, but it was Long Nolan whom Bonner and the magnates set on a pinnacle—Long Nolan, and, as Nolan would have it, Nolan's young commander.

It is a matter of record that when Captain Lee went back to the regiment he congratulated Lane, for one thing, on having held on to his stocks—almost the only one at

Reno who did—and, for another, on having such a youngster for second lieutenant. "He has won his spurs," said Lee, "before ever he donned his uniform." And there was rejoicing in the regiment over Lee's description of events, for five of the younger officers, graduated within three years, knew "Pops" in his cadet days and remembered him well; and all of the old officers who had served at Camp Sandy and at Fort Reynolds knew him in babyhood, or boyhood, or both. So did most of the veteran troopers.

And it is a matter of record that, on the eastward way again, both McCrea and Geordie dined with Mr. Bonner at the Chicago Club, and the new major-general commanding the military division graciously accepted Bonner's bid to be one of the dinner-party, and took Geordie aside after coffee had been served, noting that the silent young fellow neither smoked nor touched his wine, and asked him a few questions about the Point and many about the mines, and at parting the general was so good as to express the wish that when Geordie came out to

join in September he would stop and see him, all of which was very flattering to a young fellow just out of cadet gray, and Geordie, as in duty bound, said that he certainly would, little dreaming how soon—how very soon—he and the old regiment would be riding hard under the lead of that hard-riding leader, and facing a foe led by warriors true and tried—a foe any ten of whom could have made mince-meat of ten times their number of such foemen as Graham had met at the mines.

How could they, the brave young class, have dreamed, that exquisite June day of their graduation, that within six months some of their number were destined to do desperate battle with a desperate band of the braves of the allied Sioux in the Bad Lands of South Dakota?

For it is also a matter of record that Lieutenant and Quartermaster McCrea made application, as he had promised, for six months' leave of absence, with permission to go beyond sea, and with every intention of spending most of the winter in sunny

Italy. But he spent it in saddle and snow-drift, in scout and skirmish, and in at least one sharp, stinging, never-to-be-forgotten battle with the combined bands of the Sioux, and came within an ace of losing his life as well as his leave, for many a brave soldier and savage warrior fell in that bitter fight—Geordie Graham's maiden battle. Little wonder he hopes he may never see another like it.

And it all came about as such affairs have so often occurred in the past. Unheeded warnings, unnoted threats, unpunished outbreaks, that experienced soldiers about the reservation could readily understand, and foretell what was coming, and make their own individual preparations for the inevitable. But nothing they could report to superiors would shake the serene confidence of the Department of the Interior in the pacific purposes of its red children, the wards of the nation. All along in the summer and the early autumn the "ghost-dance" had been spreading from tribe to tribe, the war drum had been thumping in the villages, the Indian messiah, a transparent fraud, as all

might see, wandered unrebuked from band to band—half a dozen messiahs, in fact—and along in September, instead of Geordie Graham's best-loved chum and classmate, Connell, of the Engineers, there came to the Point a letter from that young officer, that Graham received with rejoicing, read with troubled eyes, and for the first time in his life kept from his mother. There came a time, later still, when there were many letters to be kept from her, but those sorrowful days were not as yet. This letter, however, he could not bring himself to show her, for it told of things she had been dreading to hear ever since the papers began telling of the ghost-dancing on the plains. It read:

"PECATONICA, WISCONSIN, *September 5th.*

"DEAR POPS,—I fully intended to be with you to spend a week as promised, before joining at Willett's Point, but you are more likely to be spending that week with me. I am just back from a run to the Black Hills with father. He has some property about Deadwood. Returning, I stopped two days at Fort Niobrara, as the guest of 'Sampson' Stone, whose troop is stationed there, and I tell you it was interesting. He took me up to the reservation, and I had my first look at the Sioux

on their native heath, and saw for myself how peaceful they are. Everybody at the agency is scared stiff. Every officer at the fort, from the colonel down, is convinced that war is coming. The governor of Nebraska has been up looking after the settlers and ranch folk and warning them away. General Miles has an officer there watching the situation. From him I heard that your regiment is to be sent to the field at once to march northward; that other troops are warned, and I suppose you'll be joining somewhere on the way. But the row, when it comes, will break out north of the Niobrara, and the —th may not get there in time.

"Stone says if you want a taste of the real thing, to apply for orders to report for duty to the commanding officer at Fort Niobrara until the arrival of your regiment. I have begged the Chief of Engineers to let me have a few weeks in the field with General Miles, and am assured that the general will apply for me. Not that I can be of any value as Engineer Officer, but just to get the experience, and perhaps see what we've been reading of a dozen years—a real Indian campaign. Now, old man, you know that country. You were there as a boy. *You* could be of use. Why not ask for orders at once? Then we can push out *via* Sioux City together. I know how the mother will protest, especially since she was robbed of three precious weeks in July; but, isn't it the chance of a lifetime? Isn't this what we are for, after all? Wire decision. Yours as ever,

"CONNELL."

"Good old Badger," murmured Geordie. "He always was right." Then that letter went to an inner pocket, and for the first time in his life, with something to conceal from her, George Graham turned to his mother.

It was a beautiful September evening. The gray-and-white battalion had just formed for parade. The throng of spectators lined the roadway in front of the superintendent's quarters, and with that proud mother clinging as usual to his arm, with that ominous letter in the breast of his sack-coat, so close that her hand by a mere turn of the wrist could touch it, George Graham stood silently beside her as she chatted happily with Mrs. Hazzard. Not ten feet distant, leaning on a cane, was an officer lamed for life and permanently retired from service because of a desperate wound received in savage warfare. With him, eagerly talking, was a regimental comrade who had survived the bloody day on the Little Big Horn, and he was telling of things he had seen and men whom he had met, men whose names were

famous among the Sioux and were now on the lips of the nation at large. Foremost of these was the old-time enemy of every white man, long the leader of the most powerful band that ever disputed the dominion of the West, Tatanka Iyotanka—Sitting Bull.

Not fifty miles from Standing Rock Agency, surrounded by devoted followers, dwelling in Indian ease and comfort, but rejoicing in new opportunities for evil, Sitting Bull, said the spokesman, was holding frequent powwows with the ghost-dancers, urging, exciting, encouraging all, and still the Indian Bureau would not—and the army, therefore, could not—interfere. Everywhere from the Yellowstone to the confines of Nebraska the young braves of the allied bands were swarming forth and holding their fierce and ominous rites, and the autumn air of the Dakotas rang with the death song and war-whoop. The blood craze was upon them and would not down. The messiah had appeared to chief after chief, warning him the time had come to rise and sweep the white invaders from the face of the earth, promis-

ing as reward long years of plenty and prosperity, the return of the vanished buffalo, the resurrection of their famous dead, a savage millennium the thought of which was more than enough to array the warriors for battle. "It's coming; it's *bound* to come!" said the captain, in his decisive way, "and if old Bull isn't choked off speedily we'll have work for a dozen regiments as well as ours."

Graham listened, fascinated, yet praying his mother might not hear. Secure in the possession of her stalwart son, full of joy in their present and pride in his past, she chatted merrily on. Mrs. Frazier, too, had joined them, another woman who had reason to rejoice in Geordie's prowess at Silver Shield. They were so blithely, busily, engaged that he presently managed to slip unobserved away and join the little group about the speaker. Colonel Hazzard, too, was there and held forth a cordial hand to the new-comer. Geordie's father never betrayed half the pride in him that the colonel frankly owned to.

"This must interest you not a little," said he.

"More than I can tell you, sir," was the quick answer. "More than I dare let mother know! But I have come for advice. I've a letter from Mr. Connell. Read it, sir, and tell me how to go about it. Before mother can get wind of it, I want orders to report at Niobrara."

CHAPTER XIV

A SCOUT FOR THE SIOUX

THE dawn of an autumn day was breaking over a barren and desolate landscape. The mist was rising from the silent pools of the narrow stream that alternately lay in lazy reaches and sped leaping and laughing in swift rapid over pebbly bed—the Mini Chaduza of the Sioux. The sun was still far below the eastward horizon, but the clouds were gorgeous with his livery of red and gold, and the stars had shrunk from sight before the ardor of his beams. The level "bench" through which the stream meandered, the billowing slopes to the north and south, were bare of foliage and uninviting to the eye, yet keen and wary eyes were scanning their bald expanse, studying every crest and curve and ridge in search of moving objects. Only at the very brink of

the flowing waters, and only in far-scattered places along the stream, little clumps of cottonwood-trees gave proof that nature had not left the valley utterly without shade and refuge when the summer's sun beamed hotly down upon the lower lands of the Dakotas. And now only among these scattered oases could even practised eyes catch any sign of life.

Here and there under the banks and shielded from outer view, near-by watchers might discover little, dull-red patches glowing dimly in the semi-darkness. Here and there among the timber and along the brink little groups of dark objects, shifting slowly about, betrayed the presence of animal life, and afar out upon the prairie slopes tiny black spots on every side, perhaps a dozen in all, told the plains-practised eye that here was a cavalry bivouac — a little detached force of Uncle Sam's blue-shirted troopers, thrown out from the shelter of fort or garrison, and lurking for some purpose in the heart of the Indian country.

For Indians there were by scores right

here at the old antelope crossing only the night before. The sands of the ford were still trampled by myriad hoofs of ponies and streaked by the dragging poles of the travois. The torn earth on the northward rise out of the stream was still wet and muddy from the drip of shaggy breast and barrel of their nimble mounts. No need to call up Iron Shield or Baptiste or young Touch-the-Skies, Sioux scouts from the agency, to interpret the signs and point the way. The major commanding and all his officers and most of his men could read the indications as well as the half-breeds, natives to the soil. A big band of young warriors, with a few elders, had yielded to the eloquence of the messengers of Sitting Bull and were out for mischief. They had been missing from the agencies several weeks; had been ghost-dancing with their fellows from Pine Ridge to the west, and were by this time probably on their way to swell the ranks and stiffen the back of that big chief of the Minniconjou Sioux—"Big Foot," as known to the whites, Si Tanka, as known to the Indian Bureau,

and "Spotted Elk," so said Iron Shield, the scout, as known to the Sioux themselves.

A famous character was Si Tanka. Next to Sitting Bull, now that Gall was out of the way, dying of illness and old age, Si Tanka had more influence than any chief afield, and he longed to be acknowledged head of the allied Sioux. He had been to Washington, had been photographed side by side with Mr. Blaine on the steps of the Capitol; had sold to the whites the right of way for a railway through his Cheyenne River lands. He belonged to the Cheyenne River Agency far to the east, and declined to live there. He had his own village up in the Cherry Creek country, midway between the troops at Fort Meade in the Black Hills and Fort Bennett on the Missouri. He had white man's log-cabins, wagons, furniture, horses, hens, and chickens. He had, moreover, hundreds of cartridges, and the means and appliances wherewith to reload his shells, and he had, what was worse, a lively son, Black Fox, who had more Winchesters than he knew what to do with, and an insa-

tiable longing to use them against the whites.

Ever since the ghost-dancing had begun, Si Tanka stayed in the open. Agents went forth and begged him to come in where he belonged—to the Cheyenne Agency at the east, or to the Pine Ridge to the southwest, or the Rosebud to the southeast, or, if his lordship preferred, he might even go camp near Fort Meade, or surrender at Standing Rock Agency to the northeast, but to be out in the wilds and barely one hundred miles from Sitting Bull, also posing as a private and sovereign citizen, accepting government support but declining government supervision—that was something the Indian Bureau viewed with alarm, and well it might, for if Tatanka Iyotanka (Bull Sitting Big) and Siha Tanka, Si for short (Foot Big), should take it into their dusky heads to be allies and not rivals, if the great Uncapapa and the big Minniconjou were to join forces, there would be the mischief to pay all over the West. So the Bureau sent and civilly requested. Si Tanka most uncivilly

replied, and Tatanka Iyotanka scorned to reply at all.

What made matters bad was this, that young braves were eternally getting crazy over the ghost-dancing and going off to join these big chiefs. "*Akichita hemacha*" ("I am a warrior"), being all they had to say to friends and teachers who sought to dissuade them.

Away up at Fort Meade, in the Black Hills, were some high-mettled fellows, cavalry and infantry, who were eagerly watching the indications, one burly major of Horse fairly losing his temper over the situation, and begging the powers to let him take his capital squadron, with one or two companies of infantry, and, between his horsemen, his "walkaheaps," and himself, sturdy "Napa Yahmni," as the Sioux had named him, swore he'd bring Big Foot to his senses and back to the agency. Napa yahmni meant "three fingers," that being all that were left on one of his hands after a scrimmage with Southern sabres during the great Civil War. Really, there was reason why something should be

done, or surely the settlers and ranch folk would be made to suffer. And with troops there at Fort Meade, in the Hills, and over at Fort Yates, on the Missouri, and at Fort Robinson off to the southwest, or Niobrara here to the east, it was high time Mr. Big Foot was made to behave, and still the government stayed its orders and held its hand.

One cool-headed, nervy, mild-mannered young officer had taken his life in his hands, and a half-breed interpreter in civilized clothing, visited Si Tanka's big village and had a talk with his turbulent braves, to the end that as many as forty decided to quit, go home and be good, give up evil spirits, intentions, and ghost-dancing, to the rage of Black Fox and the amaze of Napa Yahmni, but it wasn't a week before another Messiah broke loose among the sand-hills of western Nebraska, and braves by the dozen sped thither to hear him; and presently both agencies had another influx of outsiders, urging revolt and uprising, and the old men counselled vainly, and preachers and teachers pleaded without avail. The young wards of

the nation were ripe for mischief. The day of their deliverance had come. The Messiah was calling his chosen to the wild wastes of the Bad Lands, where they could sing and shout and dance till they dropped, and then if they went mad with religion, and away to the warpath, it meant woe for western Nebraska and for the Dakotas far and near. This was the situation that called for a scout from Fort Niobrara, and thus it happened that for over a fortnight a little column of cavalry had been patrolling the breaks and the valleys away to the northwest, peering into the old haunts of the Sioux along the headwaters of the pretty streams rising among the hills beyond the weather-beaten landmark of Eagle's Nest. They found lodge poles a-plenty on Black Pipe Creek, and the ashes of many a little fire along Pass Creek and Bear-in-the-Lodge, and away to the Yellow Medicine. They circled clear round the wild worshippers, it seems, far west as the Wounded Knee, without ever encountering one; and yet keeping them on the move had broken up their incantations, and, as the

major believed, had worn out their obstinate determination to stick to their medicine-men and Messiahs whether the Great White Father would have it or not.

For two days the column had followed, eastward now, the trail of a big band, and just when Baptiste and Touch-the-Sky, interpreters, would have it that the crazy chiefs and their followers had been fairly headed off and balked of their purpose of joining Big Foot beyond the Cheyenne, just when it seemed likely that another day would enable the troops to overhaul them and herd them peaceably, if possible, forcibly, if not, back to the sheltering wing of the agency and the Indian police, lo, just at sunset, after a long day's march, a corporal had come galloping, full cry, from the rear-guard, while the scouts were still far out to the front: "The Indians are back of us at least six miles, going like mad for the north!"

Then the major commanding said things that made his pilots' ears tingle. It was all gospel truth. Finding themselves followed and being steadily pressed onward toward

the fort and the settlements, the astute warriors had left a goodly sized party ambling along in front, to lead the cavalry on; had dropped away all afternoon by twos and threes as though looking for antelope or black tail, not northward where the valley of the upper Chaduza was open and shallow and they could be seen for miles, but southward among the breaks and ravines where they were hidden entirely; had reassembled on a little branch to the southwest and then, when the column was well out of sight, had rushed for the north and the wild country so recently left; had forded the Chaduza and by moonrise were doubtless safely camped for the night on the south fork of White River. All the major could do was order his men to the right-about, march to the crossing (another weary six miles after the thirty-six of the day), and, with drooping horses and riders, unsaddle, cook supper, and settle for the night, then send couriers to the post in the morning.

And now morning had come and couriers had not yet gone, for an hour before the first

break of day—the *anpaniya* of the Sioux—there had come galloping from the northeast a riderless horse, at sight of whose blood-stained saddle and stirrup hood the herd-guard woke the officer of the pickets. The captain unrolled from his blanket, took one look by the light of the moon, and bade the corporal find Baptiste, who needed not to see the saddle; he knew the horse at a glance.

"Pete Gamble's," said he. "They've begun killing!" And Pete Gamble was a ranchman well known to them all, both Indian and white. "If they would kill *him*," said he, "they would kill anybody."

And as if this were not enough, barely half an hour later two men, mad with terror, came spurring in over the northward ridge, almost delirious with joy to find themselves in the presence of friends. Their little hunting camp, they said, had been suddenly "jumped" early in the night. They had managed to get out with stampeded horses, but every one else was butchered, and the Indians were after *them*. The major doubled his guards to the north and awaited the

Indian coming. He would not rouse his wearied men until actually assailed.

But now it was fairly broad daylight, and not an Indian feather had shown nor an Indian shot been heard. Slowly, sleepily, at the gruff summons of their sergeants, the troopers were crawling out of their blankets and stretching and yawning by the fires. No stirring trumpet-call had roused them from their dreams. A stickler for style and ceremony was the major in garrison, but out on Indian campaign he was "horse sense from the ground up," as his veterans put it. He observed all formalities when on ordinary march, and none whatever when in chase of the Indians.

He had let them sleep to the very last minute, well knowing he might have stern demands to make that day. He and his adjutant had reduced the statements of the hunters to writing, and a brief, soldierly report was now ready to go to the general commanding the department, who had come out to Fort Niobrara to be nearer the scene of action. The fort lay nearly fifty miles away,

south of east, the agency even farther to the north and east, and the recalcitrant braves were heading away through the wilds of their old reservation, and might stop only for occasional bite, sup, or sleep until they joined forces with Big Foot or Black Fox, full a hundred miles as the crow flies, for now were they branded renegades in the light of the law.

In the crisp, chill air of the late autumn morning tiny smokes from the cook-fires sailed straight aloft, melting speedily into the blue. For nearly half a mile along the stream horses and pack-mules were scattered upon the "bench," browsing eagerly on the dew-laden bunch grass. Farther out beyond them on every side, with their campaign hats pulled down over their grim eyebrows and their heads deep in the collars of their cavalry overcoats, the men of the guard still kept vigilant watch. Long years of experience on the Indian frontier had taught their leaders the need of precaution, and the sentries took their cue from the "old hands." By a little camp-fire,

booted, spurred, slouch-hatted, like his troopers, and muffled in a light-blue overcoat that could not be told from theirs, the major commanding was giving brief directions to three troopers who stood silently before him, their carbines dangling from their broad shoulder-belts, with the reins of their chargers in hand. Wiry and gaunt were these chargers, wiry and gaunt were the men, for those were days when neither horse nor rider went over-weight on campaign, or came back with a superfluous ounce. But horses and men had stripped for the day's work. Blanket, poncho, and overcoat, saddle-bags, side lines, lariat, and picket-pin—everything, in fact, but themselves, their arms, cartridges, canteens, saddles, saddle-blankets, and bridles—had been left to the pack-train. A good breakfast to start with, a few hardtack and slices of bacon in the breast-pocket of the hunting-shirt, settled the question of subsistence. They were to start at once, deliver those despatches at Niobrara, unless headed off by Indians, long before set of sun, and be back with reply before its rise on the morrow.

Then came the question as to the fate of the poor fellows of Gamble's and the hunters' camp.

"Mr. Willard," said the major to his adjutant, as the couriers mounted and rode away, "send one platoon over to Gamble's camp—it 'll take 'em all day—and another back on the trail of the teamsters, and see what they can find of the outfit. They'll have to hunt for it themselves. The hunters say they wouldn't go back for a million apiece."

The adjutant was figuring in his note-book. He closed it, arose at once, and looked about him. Officers and men, the six troops, or companies, of the detachment seemed busy at breakfast. The aroma of soldier coffee floated on the keen morning air, and under the gentle, genial influence of the welcome stimulant men began to thaw out, and presently the firesides were merry with chaff and fun. A curious and sympathetic group, to be sure, hovered about the survivors of the hunters' camp, listening rather doubtfully to their tales, for the tales had taken

devious turns under cross-examination. But for the bloody trappings of Pete Gamble's horse, telling mutely of tragedy, the hunters might have met only contempt and scoffing. Indian scares were old as the trails.

"Whose turn is it?" presently questioned the major, as Mr. Willard started away. The adjutant halted and faced about:

"'D' and 'F' troops, sir."

"All right. One officer and twenty men from each will be enough."

And then came striding forward, with quick, elastic steps, a young soldier in dark-blue campaign shirt and riding-breeches, a three weeks' stubble on his clear-cut, sunburned face, a field-glass slung over one shoulder, a leather-covered note-book tucked away inside his cartridge-belt. No sign of rank was visible about his dress, yet there could be little doubt of it. The major looked up, smiling.

"Fast going for topographical notes yesterday, wasn't it, Mr. Connell?"

"I'm afraid so, sir. Indeed, I'm ashamed to submit them, but I wouldn't have missed

this scout for a month's pay, all the same."

"Well, we don't often see the engineers on this sort of duty. I'm glad the general sent you along. What is it, captain?" he broke off, turning to a gray-mustached, choleric-looking veteran who came suddenly upon them, breathing rather hard.

"Major," began the stout man, impetuously, "this makes the third time in ten days 'F' Troop's been ordered on side scout, or some part of it. Now we're ordered back to hunt up what's left of that wagon camp, and—"

"One moment, captain," interposed the commander, placidly. "You say 'we.' My orders are only one officer and twenty men."

"Well, I have only one officer with me, and *he* don't belong," was the querulous rejoinder. "He's simply a volunteer with the command, and so utterly inexperienced that I consider it necessary to go myself. I can't trust my men to a mere boy just out of school."

"That will do, Captain Garrett," said the

major, promptly, yet with absolutely unruffled tone and temper. "If *I* can, *you* may. Mr. Graham has had more experience than you are aware of."

"Does Mr. Graham go—in command?" asked Connell, eagerly, as Captain Garrett, silenced, but swelling with amaze, stood helplessly by. "May *I* go with him, sir?"

"By all means, Mr. Connell, if you wish."

XV

FIRST SIGHT OF THE FOE

IN half an hour the sun was up and two little detachments of cavalry were up and away — one of them, under Lieutenant O'Fallon, filing out of the cotton-woods, at the eastward verge, and heading straight on the trail of the couriers, who were already out of sight down the valley; the other, leaving a few minutes later, was just disappearing from view of the watchers in the bivouac, over the low ridge or divide that spanned the northward sky-line. Once before, five years back, Geordie Graham had led a little cavalry command on a swift and successful chase after a gang of frontier desperadoes who had robbed the bank at Argenta. Now, for the first time in his life, he was both guide and commander. Now, as they had done time and again in cadet

days, Connell and Graham, "Badger" and "Coyote," went side by side, almost hand in hand, on the path of stirring and at last perilous duty.

To Connell the scout had thus far been one of almost unalloyed enjoyment and profit. Attached to the staff of the commander as engineer and topographical officer, he had ridden at will on the flanks of the column, a single orderly his sole attendant, a prismatic compass his only instrument. Then with the declining hours of the day came the making up of his notes, and after supper the hours of confab with Geordie, who, whenever possible, would come over to headquarters camp-fire. There was no sociability at his own.

"It is too bad," Major Berry had confided to Connell the third day out. "It just so happened that 'Old Grumbly' was the one captain without a subaltern when Mr. Graham reported for duty with us, and your fine young classmate had to take the place of one of the absentees. The colonel couldn't help himself. Grumbly is a good

soldier in his way, Mr. Connell, and knows his trade, too. I suppose Graham has—sized him up?" This with a cock of his head and a keen glance.

"Shouldn't wonder, sir; but if he has, he's kept it to himself."

"Well, if Garrett gets to bothering Graham too much, you let me know."

"I will, sir, if Graham lets *me* know, but—I'm mistaken in Graham if he opens his head on the subject."

And though the scout was now in its third week, and things had been said and done by "Grumbly" Garrett that set other men to talking, not a word had come from "Coyote."

But it soon transpired that if Graham wouldn't speak of his troop commander *pro tem.*, neither did he speak to him, save when occasion required. Day after day on the march it was noted that while the senior lieutenant of each troop rode side by side with his captain, the young West Pointer serving with "F" was almost always at the rear of its column of twos, where, as it transpired, Garrett had given him orders to march

and see that the men kept closed. But no complaint came from Graham.

Now, however, as the two old chums rode away on a side scout of their own, it might well be expected that "Coyote" would be less reticent. The eyes of half the command had followed them appreciatively as the detachment started, Graham and Connell in the lead, Sergeant Drum and his nineteen following in compact column of twos. No sooner did they reach the outlying sentries, however, than it was noted that the young leader looked back over his shoulder, and the next moment two troopers detached themselves from the rest and spurred out ahead until full six hundred yards in the lead. Then two others obliqued out to the right and left until nearly as a great a distance on the flanks.

"Knows his biz," said the adjutant, sententiously.

"Knows nothing but what I've taught him day by day," snarled Captain Garrett. "And I wash my hands of all responsibility for that detachment once it's out of sight of us."

"Shut up," growled a junior. "The 'Old Man's' got ears, and he'll hear you."

"Well, I *want* him to hear—it's time he *did* hear—and heed," was the surly answer. But "Grumbly's" eyes were wisely watching the major as he spoke, noting that the "Old Man" was busy with his binocular, following Graham's movements up the long, gradual, northward slope. The moment the major dropped it and turned toward the group, Captain Garrett changed his tone. "What I'm most afraid of is his getting lost," said he.

"You needn't be, captain," said the bearded commander, placidly. "Mr. Graham knows this country better than we do. He spent long months here before ever we set eyes on it."

Garrett's jaw dropped. "Then why didn't he tell me? How was I to know?"

"Principally, I fancy," drawled the adjutant, who loved to rub "Old Grumbly's" fur the wrong way, "because you told him two weeks ago that when you wanted advice or information on any subject from him you'd ask it."

But while Graham had as yet won no friend in Captain Garrett, he had found many among the troopers. His fine horsemanship, his kind, courteous manner to them, his soldierly bearing toward their irascible captain, had appealed to them at the start and held them more and more toward the finish. They saw the second day out that he was no novice at plainscraft. The captain had asked his estimate of the distance from a ford of the Chaduza to a distant butte, and promptly scoffed at his answer; indeed, it surprised most of them. Yet "Plum" Gunnison, pack-master, who had served seven years at the post, said the lieutenant was right. They saw within the fourth day that the new-comer was an old stager in more ways than one. "Touch-the-Sky," scout and interpreter, said the lieutenant knew sign talk, which was more than their captain did. They were to see still more within the compass of a day's march, but they had seen enough in their two weeks' comradeship to give them confidence in the young officer they never felt for their

own and only "Grumbly," who, with all his experience, would often blunder, and Grumbly's blunders told on his troop, otherwise they might not have cared.

In low tone the troopers were chatting as they crossed the divide and once more came in view of the two far out in advance, riding now northeastward. They were following back, without much difficulty, the hoof-prints of the two fugitives who, riding in terror and darkness, had so fortunately found their bivouac at break of day. And it was of these two both the men and their young officers were talking as the little party jogged steadily on.

Peaceful hunters and law-abiding men the pair had represented themselves. They were originally five in all — three "pardners," a wagoner, and a cook. Their "outfit" consisted of a covered wagon with four draught and three saddle horses. They indignantly spurned the suggestion that they had whiskey to swap with the Indians for fur and peltries. They had a ranch down on Snake River, were well known in Valentine, had never

made trouble, nor had trouble, with the Indians; but the game was all gone from their home neighborhood, and so long as they kept off the reservation they knew there was no reason for the Indians troubling them. And here came another suggestion. The "Old Man," Major Berry, had somewhat bluntly asked if they did not know they had been trespassing, had been well within the reservation lines and north of Nebraska, and the two swore stoutly that Lem Pearson, partner and projector of the enterprise, had said he knew the country perfectly, had been there half a dozen times, and they left it all to him. They never dreamed they were doing wrong until their camp was "jumped" in the dead of night, and the Sioux chased them every inch of the way till they got in sight of the cavalry.

Yet here was the detachment, at six o'clock of this sparkling morning, clear out of sight of the rest of the cavalry, and half-way across the long swale of the next divide, and, though the print of the shod horses was easily followed, not once yet, anywhere—although

the little troop was spread out in long extended line and searched diligently—not once had they found the print of a pony hoof. Now they were full an hour, and nearly four miles, out from camp, and Geordie signalled, slowly swinging his campaign hat about his head, for his men to assemble, then dismount and take their ten minutes' rest.

"Con," said he, presently, "it's my belief those scamps were lying. The only Indians near the Chaduza were those that skipped for White River last night and are probably heading for Eagle's Nest now. Their trail must be three miles or more west of us here, and South Fork isn't three miles ahead. We'll see it from yonder ridge."

Connell was squatting, tailor fashion, on the turf, and thoughtfully playing "mumble-t'-peg" with his hunting-knife, while his troop horse cropped thriftily at the bunch grass. Graham had been giving a glance over his little command, watching the resetting of a saddle or a careful folding of a blanket. It would presently be time to mount and start, but there was something on his mind, and,

as of old, he wanted to have it out with his chum.

Connell drew his knife from the sod, then, with the point on the tip of the left forefinger and the haft deftly held between the thumb and finger of his right, shifted it over by his right ear and sent it whirling down, saw it sink two inches in the sand, bolt upright, then queried: "They said their camp was on the Fork ten miles away northward. Could that be?"

"It might. The Fork turns almost square to the north and runs back of Rosebud. But what I mean is, they weren't chased by the Sioux. I doubt if they fought them at all."

"How about Gamble's horse? — and the blood? There's been some kind of a fight. Look, Con! There's a signal!"

Surely enough. As Connell sprang to his feet and the men quickly turned to their grazing horses, one of the troopers, far in advance, could be seen close to the crest of the divide. He had dismounted to creep forward and peer over, and now, half-way back to where he had left his horse, was

waving his hat, with right arm extended from directly over his head down to the horizontal and to the east.

"Mount!" said Geordie, quietly, springing lightly to saddle with a thrill of excitement in his young heart. "Follow at a walk, sergeant, off to the northeast. That's where we're needed, Con."

For the advance-guard, mounting quickly, was now loping along parallel with the divide, yet keeping well down below its backbone, and, putting spurs to their horses, "Badger" and "Coyote," the chums of old, darted swiftly away to join them.

Five minutes more, while a trooper held the horses of the young officers and their guides, while in silence and with eager eyes the little detachment came jogging over the swale to the support of the leaders, three forms were crouching forward to the top of the wavelike ridge, and presently three heads, uncovered, were peering over into the valley beyond. Then the arm of one of them was outstretched, pointing. Then the field-glasses of two others were unslung, fixed and focused

on some distant object; and then back, still crouching, came one of the number, signalling to Sergeant Drum to come on. Whereupon, without a word of command, simply following the example of their foremost man, the riders gave the bridle-hand, and with the other whipped the ready carbines from their sockets, and with the butts resting on the right thigh, the brown muzzles advanced, came on at a swift trot, those in rear unconsciously pressing forward on those in front.

Then another signal—this time from their young commander, who had come running down afoot, leaving "Badger" at the crest. In the eagerness of the forward rush the riders were opening out, coming right and left front into line, as the soldiers say, and Graham's gauntleted hands—the same gauntlets Big Ben had coveted three months earlier—were extended full to right and left, the length of each arm, and then brought "palms together" in front. "Close in," it said, as plain as day, and almost instantly Drum's gruff voice could be heard in rebuke;

almost as quickly the practised riders could be seen closing the outer leg and rein. Another moment and the little line was trotting almost boot to boot. Then as they neared the point where the slope became abrupt, Graham's right hand, palm forward, went straight aloft, a gesture instantly repeated by the sergeant, and in two seconds more the horses, panting a little with excitement, were pawing the turf, and Drum's voice, low and compelling, ordered, "Count fours!" The next moment the odd numbers darted forward four yards, and halted. The next, with carbines swung over their shoulders, numbers one, two, and three were swinging from saddle, the next all horses were again in one line, with every fourth trooper still seated in saddle; and the dismounted men deftly lashing their reins to the headstalls of numbers two and three, while three himself passed his reins up to number four. Then, nimbly, with carbines at trail, up came a dozen wiry young fellows in dusty campaign rig, running swiftly up the slope, and in another moment were sprawling on

their stomachs close to the crest, their slouch hats flung aside.

And this was what they saw: Before them, to the right front, stretching away to the north, lay a broad valley, through which meandered a wider, bigger stream than the familiar Chaduza. It came winding down from the west before making its sweeping bend to the northward. It was fringed in spots by cotton-woods, and bare to the very banks in others. It was desolate and lifeless far as the eye could see, west and north. But away to the northeast, perhaps seven miles or so, a faint column of smoke was rising against the skies. Away to the northwest, perhaps a dozen miles, in alternate puffs, another and narrower smoke column was rising—Sioux signals, as they knew at once—and right down here before their eyes, midway between the shining river and the foot of the northward slope, perhaps two thousand yards out—a little more than a mile — was coming toward them a four-horse wagon, its white top a wreck, its struggling team lashed by the whip of the

driver and the quirts of half a dozen dusky outriders, while others still circled and shouted and urged them on, while afar back on the east bank of the stream other riders could be seen darting about in keen excitement. All on a sudden, but by no means all unprepared, "Corporal Pops" and his little command found themselves facing a new proposition and a band of turbulent Sioux.

XVI

PROOF POSITIVE OF GUILT

AND the first words spoken came from the lips of Sergeant Drum — like many another old campaigner among the old-time regulars, a privileged character.

"Didn't I tell ye those fellers were lyin'? Here's their wagon now, that was burnt over their heads!"

At intervals of several paces, as they could best find points from which to see without being seen from the northern side, the little detachment lay sprawled along the crest, the brown barrels of the carbines well forward. Graham and Connell, peering through their field-glasses, their elbows resting on the turf, were side by side about the centre. Behind them, nearly a hundred paces down the southward slope, stood the horses in an irregular line, a corporal remaining in charge,

keenly watching the movements of his superiors, yet keeping constant control of the four horse-holders, who, like himself, remained in saddle. There could be no telling what moment they might be needed.

For an odd and perplexing situation was this in which the young commander was placed. Ordered to follow back the trail of the fugitive hunters to the point where they claimed to have been "jumped" by hostile Indians; ordered to find, if possible, the remains of the victims, men and horses, and of the burned wagon and "outfit"; ordered also to search for signs by which the assailants might be discovered, the command had come suddenly in sight of a wagon and horses that answered the description of those said to have been destroyed, and if that wasn't a white man driving them, both binoculars were at fault.

But what did it mean that the captors should be coming southwestward with their booty? Why had they not burned the wagon? They could never use it at the reservation. Many young men, of course,

were out and afield with the ghost-dancers, but the elders, the native police, and the agent would quickly hear of it, and trouble would follow for somebody. George Sword, Sioux chief of police and stanch adherent of General Crook — "Wichahnpi Yahmni" (Three Stars), as they called him whom so long the Sioux had honored, and whom now they were so deeply mourning — George Sword was a man who did his duty well; Geordie, as a boy, had known him, and known how the general trusted him. A wagon like this would be of no more use to the captors than a locomotive; yet here they were, a dozen of them, urging it on, while others of their kind, afar back down-stream, were darting about, little black dots of horsemen scampering over the distant slopes, evidently watching some parties still farther away and invisible to the lurking cavalry.

Could it be that they were trying to repeat an old-time deed of chivalry told to this day of their fathers—restoring lost property to the legitimate owners? Could it be that, knowing the presence of the squadron on the

Mini Chaduza, and the probability of the frightened owners having found refuge there, these Indians were now actually driving thither? They were still on their reservation. There was nothing but the fugitives' statement to warrant the belief that the camp had been attacked and burned. There was nothing, in fact, to justify an attack upon the present possessors. They would probably scatter, rush to the reservation, tell their tale to the agent, and the press and the peace societies would presently be flooding the country with columns concerning the murderous onslaught on a friendly people made by a reckless soldiery.

Yet something had to be done, and that right speedily; for now, instead of breasting the long slope, and coming, as at first, straight toward the ridge, the Indians were lashing the leaders in gradual turn to the westward. Now they were skirting the foot of the incline and moving parallel to the ridge, and then it was that Geordie saw the reason. They had made the wide sweep outward in order to circle the head of a ravine which,

starting only a few hundred yards out to the left front, went winding deeper and steeper through the "bench" until it finally opened out into the creek bottom a long mile away.

Yes, the whole scheme was evident now. They had captured the camp and the wagon with its contents, and, knowing the difficult country and crossings along the lower Fork, were scurrying with their booty around the great southward bend, hoping to get away to the west, reach the trail of the war-party that had evaded the cavalry, and follow on with their prize. Or else, still keeping within the reservation line, to drive on westward for the valley of the Wounded Knee and their red brethren of the Pine Ridge Agency, the Brulés of old Spotted Tail's (Sinte gleshka's) long famous band.

Yet there, too, this wagon would be a white elephant. Why had they not divided among themselves the simple contents of a hunter's camp outfit, cut loose with the horses, and burned the big vehicle, which they could not use?

Then all in a moment the truth flashed

upon Geordie. Years before he had heard of such traffic, heard the fierce denunciation lavished by officers and men upon the miscreants who, for love of gold, would sell to Indians, at fabulous price, the means of murdering their fellow-men. All on a sudden his voice was heard:

"Back to your horses, men! Mount, sergeant, and follow. Come on, Connell! That's why it takes four horses to lug it—that wagon is loaded with lead!"

One minute more and from the lips of one wary Indian, well out on the "bench," went up a shrill whoop of warning. Away up the the grassy incline, from over the ridge and spurring straight for the wagon, now at the head of the ravine, came two lithe young horsemen, riding like the wind, the right hand of the foremost far uplifted in the signal known the plains over—to halt. Behind these two came an orderly trooper full gallop. Behind these three, presently, there popped into view a score of slouch-hatted, blue-bloused, sturdy dragoons, and with many a screech of wrath and disgust, away

went the last of the Sioux, scooting for the shelter of the creek bank beyond. Shoot they longed to, yet dare not. The word had not yet gone forth. The medicine-men still said nay. The time was not yet ripe. A few days more must they suffer until Si Tanka and his braves were met, until, in overwhelming force, they could turn on the scattered and helpless settlers. That was easier warfare than fighting soldiers, and counted for just as much in scalps and glory. Away they went to the cotton-wood bottom, and one wellnigh exhausted, thoroughly demoralized white man collapsed on the driver's seat, and four sweating, staggering horses pulled up, panting and blowing, and the score of blue-coated riders came thundering on, to rein up in triumph around a silent but obviously excited brace of lieutenants, one of whom simply pointed into the depths of the wagon body. From under a lot of dingy camp equipage peeped out three or four little boxes the soldiery knew at sight. Sergeant Drum spurred alongside and whisked off what was left of the cover, and a dirty

blanket or two, and there was a larger box, half filled with magazine rifles. There were ten boxes of Winchester cartridges, one thousand to the box. There was the secret of the "hunter's camp." They had been selling arms to the Sioux.

"Good find, that, Geordie," grinned Connell, as his comrade sat pencilling a brief despatch to the major, while three of the men, with liberal sprinklings from their canteens and brisk fanning with their hats, were striving to revive the collapsed wagoner.

"I need his story," said our plains-wise Pops. "Pull him to, if possible," and then went on with his writing.

"SOUTH FORK, WHITE RIVER,
"*October* —'90, 9 A.M.

"*Lieutenant H. H. Willard, Adjutant Detachment —th Cavalry.*

"SIR,—I have to report that we have just intercepted a small party of Sioux driving off a four-horse wagon, which contains eleven Henry and Winchester rifles and at least ten thousand rounds of ball cartridges. This is probably the 'outfit' of the fugitives who reached bivouac this morning, reporting it burned and their comrades killed.

"One of the latter, at least, is alive, but we

found him unconscious, although unharmed. He was driving the wagon. The Indians scattered, but are now assembling in the cotton-woods a mile distant. More seem coming to join them. If attacked, we will hold out; but I wish to push on and ascertain what befell the others. We cannot, however, leave the wagon, nor have I force enough to leave a guard.

"Very respectfully,

"G. M. GRAHAM,

"*Second Lieutenant —th Cavalry,*

"*Commanding detachment.*"

Then came a significant P. S., at sight of which, little over an hour later, Major Berry's eyes snapped, and so did his speech.

"Bring those two scoundrels here!" said he, and a hangdog-looking pair they were when presently lined up before the bearded commander, while no less a personage than Captain Garrett, at the head of forty troopers, was setting forth on the trail of his much-envied subaltern, to relieve him, if surrounded and attacked by the Sioux; to relieve him, in any event, of the care of the wagon, but under no circumstances to relieve him of his command or duties. Unless menaced by strong parties of the Sioux, Mr. Graham was

to go ahead with a dozen additional men, carry out his orders, and Captain Garrett with the rest should bring that wagon to camp.

Then with Geordie's report and postscript in hand, the major stood glowering at the fugitives of the morning, now most ruefully yet furtively studying his face. They suspected something amiss when warned awhile before that they were not to try to ride off. They knew there was mischief to pay now.

"You two sku — specimens," began the major, ominously, "told me you were only accidentally on the Sioux reservation. You swore you were simply out hunting antelope."

"That's God's truth, major," whined the taller of the two, though the other seemed ready to parley and plead.

"That's an infernal lie!" was the answer. "You told me the Sioux 'jumped' your camp, killed your partner, and burned your wagon." And with menace in his burning eyes the veteran officer paused for a reply.

"'Fore God, major, that's how it looked to us. 'Course it was pitch-dark—"

"Pitch-dark—in bright moonlight! This

is worse, and more of it. You're a pair of black-hearted villains! You went there deliberately. You went with a wagon-load of arms and ammunition to sell to Sioux Indians just bound for the war-path. You'd swing for that if there was any law in the land, but swing you shall—anyhow!"

"You dassn't touch us!" burst in the leader, sudden spirit and defiance in his tone, well knowing how powerless were the military in face of civil law. "We're no poor devils of dog-robbers. We demand protection and a fair trial—a jury of our peers; that means no hide-bound gang of soldiers. You can't prove we sold so much as a shot, an' you know it, an' you're only trying to bluff."

"That's enough, *you!*" was the startling answer. "Sergeant of the guard, shoot these men like dogs if they attempt to escape. We sha'n't waste time trying to prove you sold arms. What we can prove, and will prove, and by your own man, too, and hang you high as Haman for it, is that Pete Gamble, deputy sheriff, caught you at your devilish work, and you shot him dead from ambush!"

XVII

THE WAR-DANCE AND THE CHARGE

WITH two days' cooked rations in their saddle-bags now, with a line of hearty appreciation from Major Berry and renewed instructions to go ahead, with a dozen more men than he had at the start, and the best wishes of his temporary commander, Geordie Graham had pushed on again northeastward down the right bank of the Fork. Waiting until the party was fairly out of sight over the far-distant "divide," and watching meantime the movements of the still remaining Indians in the timber, Captain Garrett finally put his puny command in march for the Mini Chaduza, bringing the wagon and the now semi-restored charioteer along. Five of Gunnison's pack-mules, sent on with the troop, had so lightened the wagon of its load

that the lately abused horses, given a good feed of oats and a swallow of water, were able to trundle it lightly along. With another day it was started under escort for Niobrara, its late owners, cursing their fate, unwilling passengers inside.

It was late afternoon when the two halves of "F" Troop lost sight of each other, the captain going, grumbling, back to the main body with a much disappointed command; the subaltern riding swiftly away down the widening valley, with an exultant platoon at his back, all hands rejoicing that theirs was the first capture of the campaign. Parallel with them, afar across the stream, darting from cover to cover and keeping vigilant watch, rode half a dozen redskins. Most of their brethren, by this time, were far away toward Eagle's Nest, in quest of the main body. These few were charged with the duty of keeping track of the little troop, in order to be able to report exactly the direction in which it was going and that no pursuit was intended. This definitely settled, they, too, galloped away, and the val-

ley, so far as Geordie could judge, was now free of red riders.

The sun was low in the west. The wagon-tracks still led on. The night was near at hand, and the troopers in advance had seen no sign of a camp. Ten miles, at least, had they marched, and, avoiding a deep westward bend of the stream, the trail now led them over a low ridge, from whose crest the scouts signalled, "Nothing in sight."

Yet, a few minutes later, Graham and Connell, dismounting there the better to scour the country with their glasses, were seen by the main body to spring to their feet and then to saddle, Graham facing toward them and with his hat signalling, "Change direction half left," whereat Sergeant Drum, riding steadily along perhaps four hundred yards behind his young commander, simply turned his horse's head in the direction indicated, left the wagon-track, and silently his comrades followed. "They've found it," said Drum, and found it they had.

Though the wheel-marks still held to the northward, and the three troopers far in the

lead had seen nothing as yet worthy of special report, the strong lenses of the signal-glass had told their own story.

"Look yonder, Connell, in that clump of cotton-woods beyond the low point," were Graham's words as he sprang to his feet. "See those black things in the timber? They're buzzards!"

Five minutes later the corporal, too, was signalling, he and his men at a halt. They, too, had made discoveries: the track, as it later developed, of two shod horses pursued by shoeless Indian ponies. Southeastward this trail went up a long, shallow ravine, then veered round to the south. It told of fugitives and, for a time, of pursuers. Ten minutes after the first discovery, down in the sandy bottom and close to the stream, the officers caught sight of a brace of prairie wolves, skulking away from the timber, among the branches of which some grewsome birds were flapping and fluttering, while two or three sailed slowly overhead. Presently the riders came in view of a little scooped-out shelter where the sand was all torn by hoofs,

and herein lay the poor remains that served as confirmation of the driver's story—all that was left, as was soon determined, of poor Gamble, one of the most feared and fearless men of the Western frontier.

Shot twice, and from behind, he had managed to gallop a few hundred yards upstream, and then, weak from loss of blood, had toppled out of saddle, crawled to this hollow, and presently died. Half a mile farther downstream the camp site was found, hoof and moccasin tracks in myriads about it, camp-kettles and débris still scattered around, empty cans, sacks, and boxes flung at the edge of the stream. Here, evidently, the traders had spent two or three days, and here, there, and everywhere were fragments of pasteboard cartridge-cases. A thriving industry, this, until suddenly swooped upon by Gamble, who paid for his discovery with his life. Here, then, was closed one chapter of the hunters' tale. But what had become of their partner? What had broken up their camp and driven them, terror-stricken, from the reservation?

Not until the dawning of another day was this fully determined. Meanwhile there came new complications—a strange and stirring adventure of their own.

Finding fair grass on the "bench" a few rods farther down the stream, Geordie had chosen a site for the bivouac, and disposed his little force for the night. While there had been as yet no overt act of hostility on the part of the Sioux, and while all the Indians taking part in the affair of the morning had now, apparently, ridden off to join the renegade band, and were presumably far to the northwest, no chances could be taken. The horses, after two hours' grazing, were led into the timber and hoppled. The sentries were posted well out. The little campfires had been screened under the bank, and full half the command had rolled in their blankets and settled to sleep. When the moon came peering up over the distant eastward heights, Geordie and Connell, chatting in low tones under a sheltering cottonwood, were suddenly summoned by a trooper coming in on the run from the outpost below,

a mile at least from where they had buried poor Gamble. "Indians, sir," said he, "and lots of 'em, coming up the valley on the other bank."

"Douse your fires, there!" was the first order. "Look well to your horses, sergeant. Stay here in charge. I'll send word what to do."

Then, with eager stride, Geordie hurried away after the messenger, Connell close at his heels. Two hundred yards they followed, winding along under the bank, and presently came to a sharp bend, beyond which and across the stream the prairie lay open and undulating for many a league, the only obstruction to the view being a little grove of cotton-woods on the opposite shore and possibly half a mile away, and that little grove and the level bench about it were alive with Indians and Indian ponies, the former at least in high state of excitement.

Kneeling behind the trunk of a fallen cotton-wood, two troopers were intently studying the situation. "They came riding down from over yonder to the northeast,

sir," said one of them, a corporal, making room for his lieutenant. "There must have been as many as a hundred all told, with others trailing behind. There's going to be a pow-wow of some kind. They've unsaddled and turned the ponies out, and some feller's shoutin' and singin'—you can hear him now, sir."

Hear him! As he warmed up to his speech, incantation, or whatever it was, the speaker could have been heard distinctly a long mile away, and all the bivouac up-stream, not already sound asleep, sat up to listen. War-chief or medicine-man, he had a voice that dinned upon the ear of night and dominated all other sounds, from guttural grunt of assent to frantic yell of applause, as the roar of Niagara in the Cave of the Winds drowns the futile babble of the guides. Once in early boyhood Geordie had heard an Indian orator of whom his father and fellow-officers spoke ever in honor and esteem—a chief whose people wellnigh worshipped him—"Rolling-Thunder-in-the-Mountains," they called him ("Hin-Mato-Iya-Latkit," in their

weird dialect). And as George and Connell knelt here now, listening to this deep, reverberant voice, thundering from bluff to bluff across the mile-wide valley, the name and fame of old Chief Joseph, whom the whites had so misunderstood and wronged, came back to the young commander with redoubled force.

But no such chief as Joseph was this who, standing in the leaping firelight, high among the red warriors about him, was lashing them to frenzy with his resounding words. No interpreter crouched with the little party at the point; none was needed to tell them that he was preaching of battle, blood, and vengeance. From time to time the wail of women could be heard, wild as the scream of the panther, and, as one sign led to another, it dawned upon Geordie and the veteran trooper by his side that some brave of the band had recently been done to death by foul means or treachery, that now the tribe was being roused to a pitch of fury, to a mad thirst for vengeance; and even before the red orator had finished his harangue the

war-drum began its fevered throb, the warriors, brandishing knife, club, hatchet, or gun, sprang half stripped into the swift-moving circle, and with shrill yells and weird contortions started the shuffling, squirming, snake-like evolutions of the war-dance. Faster, wilder went the drumbeats; fiercer, madder went the dance; and, unable to resist the impulse, Graham and Connell, secure in the belief that the Indians were utterly engrossed, crept cautiously onward and outward, with the corporal at their back, determined to see what they could of this savage and appalling ceremony.

Half-way to the scene had they crept when the shrill wailing of the squaws gave way to shriller screams, to almost maniac laughter. The orator had ceased his incantations. The wild drummers stopped their pounding. The warriors, as though with one accord, clustered about the fire in fascination, and for the moment all save the squaws were stilled, and the crouching watchers, quarter of a mile away, looked blankly into each other's faces for explana-

tion. "What on earth are they up to now?" whispered Connell.

The answer came within the minute: a sound sweeter to savage ears than love-lay of the maidens, than war-song of the braves, than even the wild, triumphant chorus of the scalp-dance; a sound that suddenly rose for a moment above the clamor of the squaws, and then was answered and overwhelmed and drowned in mad, exultant, even fiendish, yells of delight — it was the scream of a strong man in awful agony.

"My God!" cried the corporal. "They've got some poor devil there, torturing, burning him to death!"

"To the horses! Come on, Con!" was the instant answer. And the three went bounding back along the bank, pursued and spurred by the savage shouting from below, but, as God so willed it, without so much as a glance. Over the lair of the picket they flew, with only the orders "Come on!" Away over the elastic "bench" they dashed, hot-foot for the bivouac, and Drum, the veteran, saw them coming like the wind, and read their

tale and the instant need. "Saddle up!" he shouted, while the group was still afar. "Jump for it, men! There's not a second to lose!"

Up from their blankets sprang the few sleepers. In from their stations scurried the outlying sentries. Rattle went the bits between the teeth of the excited chargers. Slap went the saddles on the broad, glossy backs. There was hurry and rush and swift leaping for arms, the snap of cinchas, the snorting of steeds, yet not a word was spoken until the low order to lead into line; and straightway old Drum marshalled his men, silent, yet with hearts beating like hammers, and then down their front rode their youthful lieutenant, a stranger to all but a month agone, yet now they lived on his slightest word. Oh, what thoughts—what thoughts of mother and home, and the brave old days of boyhood and the Point, had been winging through his brain during the long hours of the day! But now—now there was no time for thought! There was time only for action; for a fellow-man lay in deadly peril, in dreadful torment, only a short mile away.

"Not a sound—not a shot, men," he ordered, as the quivering line reined up before him. "Follow our lead, stampede the ponies, and charge through the crowd; then rally quick as you can."

Splash! drove the leaders into the shallows. Breast deep, foaming, they spurred through the stream, the troop plunging after, with carbines slung over their shoulders. Out on the opposite bank and up to the "bench" they swarmed, then veered away northward over the resounding level, Geordie and Connell, classmates and chums, bounding away in advance. No danger of Indian eyes or ears, no dread of hindering shot or ambush. When the pale-face writhes at the torture stake, even Indian vedette forgets his trade for the lust of such luxury as witnessing that. Up into line with the leading four galloped the chargers in rear. On toward the leaping flames in the grove led those lithe young riders ahead. Mad with excitement, some nervous new horses snatched at their bits and burst from the line, and Geordie, glancing back, saw them gaining in spite of restraining

"'STRAIGHT THROUGH THE HERD, MEN. *CH-A-A-A-RGE!*"

hand. What mattered it, anyhow? Every second was precious. The ground was open, the herded ponies less than half a mile forward, and already alarmed. "Let 'em go!" he shouted, with a wave of the revolver over his head. "Straight through the herd, men. *Ch-a-a-a-rge!*"

Then up went a cheer that rang over the valley, shrill above the thunder of hoofs, the shriek and scream of terrified squaws, the shouts of astonished braves. Away like the wind went the streaming swarm of ponies, in mad flight for the north! Away like scatter-brained rabbits, darting hither and thither in the firelight, rushing madly to shelter, leaping from the "bench" to the sandy bottom below, scurrying in wild panic anywhere, everywhere, went warriors, women, and children; for, close on the heels of the vanishing herd came unknown numbers of blue-coated, brave-hearted, tumultuous riders, tearing through camp like a human tornado, turning the scene of the late revel into a turmoil of woe. Vain the few shots aimed in haste and excitement. Vain the rallying

cry of a fighting chief. A blow from the butt of Ned Connell's revolver sprawled him headlong over a prostrate form—a white man "staked out" in front of the fire, swooning from mingled misery, weakness, and joy.

It was Pearson, the missing "partner," captured alive by the Sioux, doomed to die by slow torture, in revenge for a young warrior shot down by the gun-traders in a senseless squabble two nights before.

And the troop had saved him and his fellow-captive, the cook, without so much as firing a shot.

XVIII

BATTLE AND VICTORY

AND this was the story that went on the heels of the escort convoying the gun-traders in to the fort, and much did Major Berry relish the composition of that report. It had long been the claim of himself and his comrades that white men were encouraged to enter the reservation with arms and cartridges, and that it was easy for the Sioux to lure their police, or to mislead the sheriff, away from the point where these unprincipled smugglers crossed the line.

Now, infuriated at the cowardice and treachery of two of their number, Pearson, the leader, and Bent, the wagoner, had made a clean breast of the business. They had driven hard bargains, had laid in good stores of beaver, wolf, and deer skins, and no little cash. Then Little Crow came, quarrelled

over an obvious cheat, called one partner a liar, was struck, abused, and thrown out. He galloped away and came back with Gamble, a man they dare not let live, once having learned their secret. Both Little Crow and he were treacherously shot by the partners as they were riding to warn George Sword and his police. Then came the swift vengeance of the Sioux, the flight of Hurley and Gross, leaving their unwary comrades to an awful fate. While one party of Indians made way with the wagon, in hopes of running it—horses, contents, and all—to the camp of Si Tanka, another party, the immediate relatives and friends of Little Crow, rode off with the two captives to the village where Little Crow lay dying, and finally, fearing interruption there, came back to the valley by night for the wildest, most delirious orgy known to Indian tradition—the slow doing to death of captured enemy by ingenious and horrible torture.

And this was the indescribable ceremony nipped in the bud by our young lieutenant and his twoscore men, to whose energy,

courage, and skill Major Berry gave all credit, though Garrett claimed it "in the name of my troop."

All night had they faced a furious and clamorous band—chiefs, warriors, and women —shouting denunciation, demanding their prey, and threatening attack in tremendous force. But Geordie had posted his men for battle, hidden the recaptured under the bank, and dared the whole band to come on and get them, if they thought it advisable, which, it seems, they did not. With his patients on Indian *travois* ("borrowed," ponies and all, perhaps without ceremony, from the supply on the spot), Graham slowly retraced his steps the following morning, and was met half-way in by the squadron in force, the heartiest kind of a welcome, and news that thrilled through his veins like the sound of the charge.

"The —th and your own troop are camped south of the line, Mr. Graham. I have orders for you to go in to-morrow."

Just so soon, therefore, as he could turn over his patients to the care of the surgeon,

write his brief report of the scout, and say good-bye and a few words of thanks to Sergeant Drum and his fellows, who longed to tell him how they hated to let him go, and after hearty handshakes from Berry and his brother officers ("Samson" Stone taking special credit to himself for having, as he expressed it, "put Graham and Connell onto the time of their lives"), our Geordie blushingly bade farewell to these comrades of a strenuous month, and, with faithful Connell at his side, and a little escort attending, rode away down to the Chaduza, to report to the general commanding, and then go on to his own, for ominous tales had come from the Bad Lands. There was trouble in store for all.

First, however, there was wonderful welcome for him at Niobrara. The skies had grown wintry. The snow patches were beginning to dot the prairie, but the campfires burned the brighter, and men clustered about them and talked of the "luck" of the new lieutenant, whom the general himself alighted from his escort wagon to greet and

UNITED STATES CAVALRY IN WINTER RIG

to question. For several days the chums were needed at the fort, where both prisoners and witnesses were held, but the case against the self-styled hunters was so overwhelming that the demand for their stay was soon at an end, and, in the train of the general, they went on westward to the winter camp of the assembled cavalry, whither "the old regiment" had preceded them, and there, one dark and wintry evening, with the snowflakes sifting down, and the depths of a distant valley all dotted with tiny blazes—the cook fires of a whole brigade—they were met by a troop of cavalry in fur caps and gauntlets, and huge, blanket-lined overcoats —swarthy, bearded fellows, with service-stained boots and trappings, but looking fit for the hardest kind of campaigning and any kind of a fight. It swung from column into line, saluted the general with advanced carbines, and then, wheeling by fours to right, trotted briskly away with the little cortège, and presently its commander, after a few words with the general, fell back, peering from under his bushy headpiece, and sung

out in cheery tones Geordie had not heard for many a day, yet knew on the instant:

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Graham! We have a horse with us ready for you now!" And lo! it was Captain Lane, with his own troop ("E" of the —th), sent out to lead the general's escort into camp. Leaving the companions of the long, jolting ambulance ride, Geordie sprang to the back of a mettlesome bay, led forward by a muffled-up trooper who steadied the young officer's stirrup before turning aside to remount, while a tall, spare, wiry-looking sergeant sat stiffly in saddle, his fur-covered hand at salute, his long gray mustache and stubbly beard and thin hooked nose being almost all that could be seen of the face; yet the twinkle in his waiting captain's eyes and a twitch in the muscles of the veteran's lips set Geordie to staring, and presently out went his hand and up went his glad young voice:

"Nolan! Nolan! *You* back with us again!"

"Couldn't keep out of it, sir, when we got

word that the old troop was to have another Indian campaign. No more could Toomey."

And lo! it was his friend of the Big Mogul now again bestriding a troop horse, detailed specially to meet him! And Lane, with a wave of his hand and a laugh that was good to hear, left the three cronies of Silver Run to ride in together while he galloped on to his duties.

"But the mines, Nolan, and your position?" questioned Geordie, as soon as the greetings were over and he could recover from his amaze.

"The mine is as sound as a government bond, sir, and Shiner's holding down my job till I want it again; and Mr. Anthony told me to say that whenever the lieutenant got tired of soldiering to come back with Toomey and take his old trick with the shovel."

And so, joyous and laughing, the three friends of old rode down to the thronging camps in the valley, and to the stern duties that so soon awaited them.

For there came a day when men's faces

went white with the news that Sitting Bull, the great chief (Tatanka-iyo-Tanka), had died in desperate fight with the police sent to arrest him; that Si Tanka and his band, nabbed by "Napa Yahmni," had most unaccountably managed later to elude him, and were now at large, raising the standard of revolt, summoning all the wild warriors far and near to join forces with him. And then, indeed, the frontier blazed with signal-fires by night and burning ranches by day, and there came a week of hard riding for the old regiment, and of sharp campaigning for all—a week in which at last the wily red chief Si Tanka was finally surrounded and, with all his people and ponies, herded on down through the Bad Lands to the breaks of Wounded Knee—fierce, truculent, defiant. For long months he had braved the "Great Father" himself, refusing to submit to any authority; but the sight of those long columns of silent, disciplined "horse soldiers," squadrons white and black, some of them riding along with wonderful little field-guns clinking beside them on wheels,

overawed Si Tanka's followers and disheartened his friends.

There came a day when he had to submit, and agree to surrender, and go whither orders might send him, and with his fierce spirit crushed, he bowed his head and took to his lodge, and laid him down in his robes, sick, body and soul. And then the old regiment marched over to the mission to guard prisoners and property, and another was sent scouting after scattering little war parties, and Connell, who had again been serving with the general, got word to Geordie that orders had come putting an end to his "holiday," and calling him East to his legitimate duty. Could Geordie get over to see him, and the disarming of Big Foot's band, on the morrow?

Graham showed the missive to his captain, and Lane took it to the colonel. "Let Graham go," said the latter. "There's nothing to be done here."

And so it happened that once again the two chums were together, and this time on a momentous and perilous day.

They saw from the hill-side the scowling braves of Big Foot, led forth from camp and seated on the ground, shrouded in their blankets, in long, curving lines. They saw the designated troops of a rival regiment drawn up in silent array, facing the sullen warriors. They saw the women and children of the latter huddled at the edge of the Indian camp, while officers, sergeants, and soldiers were sent searching through the frowzy lodges for secreted arms. Through their glasses they saw the old medicine-man, in the centre of the Indian ranks, glancing furtively, savagely, right and left, his lips moving in muttered incantation, while the searchers among the lodges came forth from one after another, baffled, empty-handed, suspicious. Why had not some one suggested it would be wise to search, individually, each brave before conducting him to the line?

"There's going to be trouble, Con!" cried Graham, suddenly dropping his field-glass. "Look! There goes McCrea!" And surely enough, at that very instant, as though he,

"UP WENT TWO LITTLE PUFFS OF EARTH"

too, had noted the ominous signs, their elder comrade came galloping diagonally across the front, heading straight for the spot where stood the commander of the silent little battalion. "He's going to warn them," answered Connell. "Let's join him."

And just as he spoke, and before either could turn to the waiting horses, up into air went the hands of the chanter, up went two little puffs of earth, sand, and gravel as he tossed them on high; and before even they could come sifting and showering downward, up in a flash sprang the muttering line, off went every blanket, and out leaped a warrior, armed and painted for battle. Suddenly they whirled on the searchers advancing upon them. Crash went their wild volley, downing both friend and foe, for the first shots tore straight through the huddle of women, and their shrieks followed swift on the deadly clamor of the guns.

And then for a moment there was dire confusion. In the space of a second, it

seemed, the red line had leaped to its feet, then dashed through the smoke of its volley, straight for the cowering forms of old men, women, and children. Another second and, sheltered by the skirts of their squaws, the warriors were blazing away at the astonished soldiery. "Good God, boys, we can't fire on women and children!" shouted one brave young sergeant. "Down on your faces! Down!" And "down" was his last word, as down on his bullet-riven face he plunged, shot dead through the brain.

Almost at the same moment McCrea's galloping steed stumbled heavily forward and rolled stiffening on the frozen earth, his gallant rider flung headlong beyond him. Another moment and Geordie and Connell, leaping from saddle, had run to his aid, even as the crash of a volley, at the word of command, told that the troopers had answered the furious challenge. Another moment still, and a young surgeon sprang to the relief of the signalling officers; and then, leaving their senseless friend to his care, all athrill with the fury of battle, Graham and

Connell, "Badger" and "Coyote," whipping out their revolvers, rushed on down the slope to join the blue line just springing afoot to the charge.

Of the moment that followed, the wild cheer and onward dash, the race over blood-stained snow-patches, the stumble over falling forms (some friend, some foe), the ripping and slashing at fire-spitting lodges, in which some of the band had sought refuge, the agonized screaming of children, the appalling shrieks of the squaws—of all this it was difficult later to give clear account. Geordie only knew that he, and those nearest him in the rush through the smoke, lost many a shot rather than risk killing fleeing women and babes, spared warriors who would never spare them, for down went first one comrade, down went another, and all on a sudden something bit, stung, and tore through his thigh, and down on his outflung arms, with Con sobbing over him, went Geordie Montrose Graham, first captain the year agone, fireman in July, and now junior lieutenant of Company "E."

Many a Christmas holiday was spoiled that winter by the news from Wounded Knee. "Bud" Graham, Columbia freshman, spending a fortnight with father and mother at the Point, had gone with them and Colonel Hazzard to Grant Hall one starlit evening. Orders were to be published to the corps of cadets at supper, and the commandant wished them to hear. They ascended the broad stone steps, Mrs. Graham on the arm of the colonel, Mrs. Hazzard escorted by grim "Dr. Sawney," who was wondering not a little what might be coming. Two or three officers from the mess joined the little family party, and they all clustered at the big folding-doors—Bud breathless with anticipation and excitement. The cadet corporal of the guard saluted at sight of the distinguished arrivals, and, at a sign from the colonel, held open the portal on one side so that, without being seen, the visitors could distinctly hear what might be read within.

And presently it came. In ringing tones the adjutant ordered attention. The chatter and clamor instantly ceased. Briefly the

young officer rattled off the details for the morrow, and then announced:

"The following communication is published for the information of the battalion of cadets:

"FIELD HEADQUARTERS,
"FORT NIOBRARA, NEB., *December* —, 1890.
"COMMANDING OFFICER, —TH CAVALRY,
"*In the Field, near Wounded Knee.*

"SIR,—The general commanding the military division directs me to notify you of the return of the detachment under Major Berry, —d Cavalry, after a thorough scout of some three weeks' duration, resulting in the breaking up and scattering of several of the bands of 'ghost-dancers,' and the capture of at least one large party now being sent under escort to Pine Ridge Agency.

"One most important result of the scout was the discovery and arrest of certain white men engaged in selling arms and ammunition to the Indians, the capture of much of their 'outfit,' and the rescue, under circumstances of imminent peril, of two of the party whom the Indians were in the very act of putting to death by torture.

"The entire credit for this exploit, which was conducted with excellent judgment and most commendable dash and daring, is given by Major Berry to Lieutenant George Montrose Graham, of your regiment, and the division commander—

But he could be heard no further. The iron discipline of West Point was powerless to stem the torrent of cadet enthusiasm at this public mention of their beloved leader of the year gone by. Up sprang the entire corps, and the rafters rang with the thunder of their cheers—a thunder that seemed to redouble rather than dwindle at sight of the silver-haired commandant, smiling in through the opening door.

And from such a scene as that, with streaming eyes and trembling lips and a heart overflowing with pride, joy, gratitude, and the longing to throw herself upon her knees and pour out her very soul in praise and thanksgiving, this devoted mother was summoned to another.

The doctor had fled away from the bevy of friends who had hastened to congratulate and shake him by the hand. He had finally escaped to his little den, trying to compose himself, and write calmly and judiciously, as became a father, to his soldier son. Bud, nearly wild with delight, had finally been "fired," as he expressed it, from Cadet

Frazier's room by the officer-in-charge, and started for home toward half-past ten o'clock, when in front of the officers' mess he was suddenly hailed by a grave-faced professor:

"You're needed at home, Bud," and, running, he found Colonel Hazzard and his father at the library door, a telegram open in the latter's trembling hand.

"Not a word now, son. Just read this and then—call mither."

With paling face and suddenly swimming eyes, Bud read the dancing words:

"Severe action. Graham wounded; left thigh. Serious, but doing well. Our loss heavy.

"(Signed) McCREA."

And so they got the first news of the bitter midwinter battle that ended the days of Big Foot and so many of his band, that cost us the lives of so many gallant officers and men, among the icy flats and snow-patched ravines along the Wounded Knee.

But there came a meeting in March that brought surcease for all that fond mother's

sorrow. There came an evening when the battalion, in its muffling winter garb of gray, went bounding up the broad stone steps into the old mess-hall, and, stripping off caps and overcoats, quickly settled down to their hearty supper, for the days were longer, the first spring drills had begun, and tremendous appetites had these alert young fellows. The clamor and chatter began on the instant —a merry riot of chaff and fun. No outlying picket gave warning of the approach of disturbers, but once again that great-hearted commandant had planned a demonstration that should delight a mother's soul. Once again he was leading her up to the massive portal, with a tall youth swinging on crutches beside her, and a joyous little party in her train. Only that day had he arrived—her Geordie—a little pallid from long housing and wearied from the long ride, but wonderfully well and happy otherwise, and assured that a few weeks more would see him strong as ever. Connell had met him at Buffalo. Bud was up from New York. McCrea had escorted him all the way from Chicago, where

John Bonner would have held him for a week of lionizing, but he could not be stopped for an hour. Nolan and Toomey had ridden every mile to the railway to see their young leader aboard, but over the meeting with that yearning mother there was none on earth to spy. Long hours she kept him to herself, but, now that evening had come, she yielded him to the colonel's pleading.

"It is for their sake," said he, and for their sake even Geordie consented.

And so, very much as he had planned on the previous occasion, Colonel Hazzard led them to the door as supper was nearly over, having previously notified his officer-in-charge, but no man in the corps was in the secret. "Whatever happens," said he, "shall be entirely spontaneous."

For a moment they waited until, as before, the voice of the adjutant was heard, clear and commanding, above the clamor. Then came the publications, a perfunctory order or two, and then the colonel put forth a hand,

pushed open the door, and while Mrs. Graham and Bud, trembling with excitement, clung to each other's arms, and the rest of the group instinctively closed about them, Hazzard turned to the two young graduates—his captains of the year gone by, now looking not a little white and by no means happy—and signalled "step within," he himself close following, and throwing wider the door so that Mrs. Graham might see.

As the big half swung slowly inward, and the two crutches were planted across the threshold, Connell hung back, but the colonel would not so have it. The corporal of the guard, surprised at the intrusion, stepped forward to check the strangers within their gates, then as suddenly halted, his eyes alight with instant recognition and rejoicing, his hand springing up in salute, even as the cadet officers at the head of the nearest tables found their feet in instant and irresistible impulse. Up, too, sprang the first captain, at the opposite side, his first thought to rebuke, his second, at sight of the

halted trio, to shout with delight. Before he could gather his wits the matter was settled for him, for all. The adjutant, amazed, dropped his paper and uplifted his eyes, for his voice was stilled by a stentorian shout from an inner table and the simultaneous rush of a light-footed fellow who almost swept Pops off his crutches as his arms flung about him. "Cyclone" Holt, a big-lunged Kentuckian, had bounded to his chair with a yell of "Hurray! 'Badger' and '*Kiote*!'" and all order was gone in an instant. Up as one man sprang the startled battalion. Had Holt gone mad? Had Frazier a fit? For answer came cheers from those nearest the door, cheers that spread like wildfire from table to table, and all in a second every young soldier was swinging a napkin and shouting like mad—some leaping on chairs, some even mounting the tables, a scene such as the mess-hall never witnessed before. Vain the effort of some one to guide the cheering (they had not then learned an academy yell), and for once in its day the corps went wild, every man for himself.